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THE HANDWRITING  
ON THE WALL,

A STORY,

BY EDWIN ATHERSTONE,

AUTHOR OF "THE FALL OF NINEVEH,"  
ETC. ETC.

"THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE, AND ART FOUND WANTING."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.  
1858.

249. v. 54

LONDON:  
R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.






## P R E F A C E.

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“THUS saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus . . . . I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight : I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron : And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayst know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name : I have surnamed thee, **THOUGH THOU HAST NOT KNOWN ME.**”

Should there be, among the readers of the following narrative, any, to whom the character of Cyrus is unknown, a perusal of the fore-





going passage from Isaiah will, it may be hoped, prepare him to find that, though, as an instrument chosen by Heaven for a mighty work, he was, doubtless, a great and good man, *yet, was the God of Israel unknown to him*. By the priests of his native country, Persia, had he been trained to a belief of the religion therein established; and in that belief, —though without even a shade of bigotry,—he seems to have continued, up to that time, at least, when Babylon fell before him. The earliest tendency of his mind toward the purer doctrine of the Hebrews, is intimated in the following narrative: and, during so brief a period,—(for the action of the whole work occupies a space of less than three days, and one night)—no more decisive change in his belief could well be expected. That, however, he became wholly a convert to it, in the first year of his reign, seems sufficiently evidenced, by the three first verses of the first chapter of Ezra. Nevertheless, during the short time that he is now about to appear before the reader,—*not* as a worshipper of the God of Israel,—but as a highly enlightened heathen

only, will any believer in Scripture expect, or desire, that he should be represented.

Of the character of Belshazzar, little, indeed, is known. That he was eminently wicked, may reasonably be inferred, from the extraordinary manner in which his doom was announced from above: and as *pre*-eminently wicked, and brutish, therefore, has the author felt justified in depicting him.

For even a free use of the Supernatural, in a narrative, the chief incident of which,—though a fact that no believer in the Bible dare question,—is, itself, in the highest degree supernatural, perhaps little apology may be thought necessary. He may have wrongly judged; but, to the present writer, it appears, that, not only does the one great acknowledged fact of the Supernatural *permit*; but, perhaps, for the establishment of greater harmony throughout the whole, *require*, that gleams of the same mysterious light,—though in lower degrees of intensity,—like the successively fainter repetitions of a dominant color in a picture,—should be cast on those other portions of the structure, which, though built up

with, and around, the one great Fact, are the work of Imagination only.

One word more. For a work, founded on Bible-History, the intelligent reader will probably feel, that a style, tinged, as far as may be, with that same rich hue which glows over the Hebrew Scriptures, would be, *generally*, the most fitting, — although, assuredly, the most difficult of attainment.

Disquisition on the peculiar qualities of that style, would, in this place, be inappropriate. One striking characteristic, however, it may be allowable to mention, — that marvellous diction, namely, — so exquisitely simple, and transparent : so effective, — not, alone, for the expression of that which is, itself, simple, or homely ; but, for the outpouring of thoughts, the most sublime ; images, the most grand, gorgeous, or terrible ; metaphors, similes, hyperboles, personifications, the most vivid, and daring ; nay, even, — as, in other compositions, and by frigid critics, they might be termed, — the most exaggerated, and extravagant.

To catch, *on fitting occasion*, — though even

but faintly, somewhat of the *spirit* of such a style, while avoiding any direct imitation of its material forms, has, with all humility, been the author's earnest desire. Should he have wholly failed in this arduous task, more just, nevertheless, would it be, that the blame should be laid,—not on the attempt itself, but on the writer's inability to accomplish it. No very profound critic, surely, would he be, who could desire, that a subject, grand enough for the lofty Epic, should be treated in the familiar, *natural* style of a mere Novel; or even in the very choicest phrase, of purely modern dialogue, and narrative.



THE  
HANDWRITING ON THE WALL.

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THE FIRST DAY.

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CHAPTER I.

ON the seventeenth day of the month Sivan,\* and in the year Five Hundred and thirty-eight before Christ, two travellers were journeying over the immense and fertile plain in which stood then, in all her glory, the proud and mighty city of Babylon. To a spectator of that day, their appearance would have instantly denoted them to be of the despised and long-oppressed people of Israel.

Their dress consisted of a vest of thin white cotton ;—an under garment, of cotton also, for the lower limbs, extending from the loins to the ankles ;—a loose tunic, of the same cool material, descending to the knees, and girded round the waist by a belt of white leather, secured by clasps

\* Corresponding to portions of our May and June.

of brass ;—a cap, somewhat resembling the modern turban ;—and boots, originally of a soft pale-coloured leather, turned up at the toe, and reaching above the calf of the leg. In two small bags of leopard-skin, which at present hung upon the left arm of the younger traveller, were two ample cloaks of fine white wool, ready for use, should occasion call ; a couple of bottles, formed of goat-skins, for carrying such liquids as might be obtained by the way ; and some light refreshments, of wheaten cakes, and dried fruits, which they had that morning purchased from the husbandman, in whose humble abode they had passed the night. But, with long travel, their garments were soiled and worn ; and might easily have been taken to denote that the wearers were of a very lowly class, had not the aspect and manners of the men hinted the probability, that such attire was less suited to their station, than to their convenience and security as travellers.

There was, in those days, little law to protect the wayfarer. Organized bands of robbers, and groups of wandering soldiers, fell, remorselessly as the hawk on the dove, upon travellers whose appearance indicated the possession of anything worth the trouble of taking it from them.

Yet, unless confident in great superiority of numbers, or of weapons, few would have ventured openly to confront the two men who now, at slow pace, toiled on beneath a sunshine, like a bath of fire. The long grey beard of the elder man ;

the furrowed face, grave and noble ; the somewhat stooping figure, still tall, though bent now, perhaps, as much with weariness as with age,—told that he had at least reached, if not passed, his seventieth year. Fatigue, and the excessive heat, caused large drops of sweat to trickle down his face ; his eye was anxious ; and, when not bent on the ground, was fixed on the sky-shooting summit of Babel's tower, crowned by the colossal gilded statue of Baal ; which alone, of all the mighty city, had, for hours past, been visible.

Heavily he leaned on his staff : stopped now and then, as if unable to proceed ; and, lifting his cap from his grey head, yet holding it so as still to shade him from the fiery beams, appeared to be marvelling, if the customary cooler air of declining day would never come to their relief. Slowly again, then, dragged he on his wearied limbs : at long intervals only did he utter a word ; and feeble indeed would have been all the resistance which he could have made, against even the puniest robber of the way.

But of other sort was his companion. Some twenty-five years would have summed his age. His stature was not absolutely gigantic ; but, by head and neck, would have overtopped the common height of men. Broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and large of limb, he might have appeared one of that heroic race of the days of old, before the sweep of whose sword, men fell in battle, like corn before the sickle of the reaper. But the mind



that looked out through the expression of his face, was not that of one who delights in war; either for the gratification of animal propensities, or for the glory, the pomp, or the power that may attend the successful hero. The long waving locks, that fell beneath his cap; the short, thick, curling beard, were black as midnight. His large dark eyes were brilliant, yet mild. His complexion, naturally pale, was now, from long travel under a burning sky, flushed like a white cloud touched by a red sun-beam of evening. His countenance habitually expressed thoughtfulness and gentleness; yet strength and majesty. The lion-heart, indeed, was within; and had, at times, irresistibly impelled him to action: yet this had been when the nobler human feelings had stirred up into flame the fire that usually slept; cooled, nay almost extinguished, by lofty thoughts, and holy feelings. He had, it is true, voluntarily entered the army of Cyrus; and, in the heat of battle, had made himself terrible to the enemy: but he had done this, partly because of the high veneration which the fine nature of Cyrus,—as seen in his actions, and widely bruited abroad,—had excited within him; and partly, nay chiefly, because in that great, though still religiously unenlightened man, he beheld the instrument appointed by God, and ages before predicted,—nay, even distinctly named, by the inspired prophet of Israel, as the overthrower of the Babylonish tyranny, the scourge of her wickedness, and the deliverer of the chosen people

from their long, and, alas! too well merited captivity.

In the momentous and fearful battle on Thymbra's plain,—where the forces under Cræsus, the king of Lydia, and the commander, then, over all the banded nations, had more than doubled those that fought for Cyrus,—he had been, amid the mighty steel-clad cavalry of Persia, as a blazing comet amid the host of twinkling stars. And when Cyrus, at length,—his horse slain, and himself cast with violence on the ground, lay stunned, helpless, and about to perish by the weapon of an Egyptian soldier, he it was who, though still but a youth, clove down the assailant,—even to the waist,—lifted, as he had been an infant, the princely warrior from the ground; placed him on his own steed; and guided him onward, till the bewildered sense came back, and the army's soul returned, to give it the victory.

Yet, portentous comet as he had been in the fight, the planet's mildest beam would best have imaged him, when the tempest of strife was ended, and the deeds of mercy could be done. Throughout that night, throughout the day that followed, unceasingly had he toiled in the nobler task of giving aid and comfort to the wounded,—foes or friends to him alike. During some weeks had he continued to labour in cause so good; albeit,—as the rough warriors told him,—so unfitted to his gigantic powers; and then, as he thought, had for ever left that career of arms, in which he

might have attained to highest distinction; but from which, soon as the fever-fit of that sole battle had passed, his nobler nature had shrunk, with loathing and remorse.

Grieved, indeed, had Cyrus been, to lose a champion so redoubtable to his foes: and with much persuasion, and with great promise of martial rank, had he striven to induce him to remain. But the young Israelite had withstood all solicitation, and refused all offers. A massive gemmed ring, taken from the finger of Cyrus, was all that he had consented to receive, as acknowledgment of the life-debt due to him by the great prince. Cyrus had embraced; had, according to the Eastern custom, kissed him on both cheeks; the last farewell, as they supposed, had been spoken to each other; and then the sated soldier had journeyed to Babylon; there to comfort in their captivity his parents, his sickly brother, and his tenderly loved sister; from whom he had been, as he *felt*, separated for half a human life, though, as he *knew*, for one brief year only.

Hard had been the task, even to his great and patient mind, to endure, and to witness the tyranny exercised by Belshazzar the king, and by all the nobles of Babylon, upon the hated and despised race of Israel; who, during upwards of fifty years, had been in captivity there; and who had been long praying, and looking for the deliverance promised to them by the seers of

old ; and now, by the mouth of their great living prophet, Daniel, announced to them as drawing nigh. Extortions of money, enforced by imprisonment and by torture, were openly practised ; not by the despot king alone, but by the lords and the rulers, and the dependants of the court. For the enslaved Jews, there was no law in Babylon ; or but the mockery of law. To a particular quarter of the city were their habitations confined ; and their oppressors knew always where to find them. For the profit of their tyrants, more than for their own, were they permitted to follow the trades, or occupations, by which wealth might be obtained. They were regarded as a hive of bees, which are encouraged, nay assisted to work ; yet merely that they may lay up the greater store of honey for their owner, whensoever he may choose to rob them of it.

It was an occasion of such kind, that had taken the heroic young Israelite from Babylon, on that journey from which he was now returning. A certain lord of the city, who in luxury and debauchery had wasted his substance, had seized the person of his aged and infirm father : had chained him in a noisome dungeon, and demanded for his ransom a price which, without utter ruin to themselves, the family could not pay.

In the desolate city of Jerusalem, still dwelt, unnoticed, few of the despised people of Israel ; and among them was a brother of the imprisoned man. He was known by his relatives in Babylon

to be both wealthy and good ; and to him, therefore, had they anxiously looked for aid.

It would have been easy for the devoted son to pass forth from the walls whenever so disposed ; since the keeper of a certain gate was one of the many who, when wounded at Thymbra, had been carried from the field in his strong arms ; had been nursed, and healed by him, with all a woman's tenderness. And that good deed had been paid with a gratitude which, on their occasional meetings afterwards, had appeared inextinguishable, and without bound. For the sake of form, however, permission to quit the city had been asked ; and, for the purpose named, most readily obtained from the robber lord ; and, on that same day, alone, and on foot, the brave and loving son had set forth on his long and perilous journey to Jerusalem. Unquestioned,—for he was still known by many,—had he passed through the Persian camp ; in safety, though not without opposition on the way, had he reached the Holy City : had found the brother of his father : had made appeal to him for the much-needed help : had been heard with grief for the sufferers, and indignation against the oppressors.

"I will go with thee, Michael," had been the reply. "I am rich, and my days can now be but few. All that I possess will I exchange for jewels and for gold ; and the cunning of the tyrants shall not discover the place wherein they shall be hidden. Thy father shall come forth

from his prison ; and I will abide with you ; and that which is mine, shall be yours also. Never yet have mine eyes beheld that mighty and wicked city, Babylon. I will look upon her ; I will behold her in all her pomp and her pride : for the day of her desolation cometh upon her even as a thief in the night."

With all prudent despatch, the benevolent old man had converted his substance into jewels, and some pieces of gold ; which were most cautiously secured amid his own garments, and those of his nephew ; and, ere a moon had wasted, he was prepared to set forth. One last sad visit paid they to the spot whereon had stood the Holy Temple of Solomon ; a ruin now, and blackened by fire. Solemnly and earnestly did they, on returning thence, worship in their own abode ; and pray to the God of Israel, for his counsel and his protecting hand, during the dangerous journey that lay before them ; and, on the following day, an hour before sunrise, mounted on horses swift and strong, they had left the city of David a league behind them.

Travelling deliberately, and with a cautious looking forth that never ceased, they had proceeded with safety till the morning of that day on which they expected to enter the wondrous city. Riding abreast, and gently discoursing together, they were passing through a wild road, thickly covered on either side by bush, and tall, rank grasses, when suddenly, with roars like a double thunder-clap,

flew through the air two monstrous beasts ; and on the horses dashed with force so great, that both the noble animals were in a moment cast down ; and in the gripe of teeth and claws.

Down with them went, perforce, their astounded riders. Yet no cry did they utter ; not a word did they speak. The old man, Zadok, though sorely shaken, strove to rise ; but his garment was pressed upon by the fallen steed ; and he could not drag it away. The fiery eyes of the lion, as he tore the chest of the horse, glared on him within the space of a few spans' length ; and his breath blew against him like steam from a caldron. Expecting instant death, he called then aloud on God : but could not take away his eyes from the great orbs, that seemed at every instant to expand, and to shoot forth fiercer flames ; nor, for the stormy growl of the devouring beast, could he hear the voice of his own prayer.

Suddenly, however, the noise ceased ; the tearing claws relaxed ; the jaws were motionless ; the fire of the eyes went out ; the great lion rolled loosely from his prey ; and lay still, as though he had been a month dead.

An instant passed ; and then the knee of Michael was on the ground beside the old man ; his hand was upon his shoulder ; his anxious voice close above his ear. Zadok was raised, and unhurt : the horses, mortally injured, were, in mercy, released from their pain ; the bags of leopard skin, in which were carried the few need-

ments of travellers so simple in all their wants, were removed from the backs of the horses, and slung over the left arm of Michael; a stout stick, cut and pruned by the dagger, was soon converted into a walking-staff for Zadok; and then they commenced on foot that journey, which had at last so exhausted the noble old man; but which, fortunately, was now drawing near to its close.

To all the instant and eager inquiries of Zadok, respecting their wonderful deliverance from the lions, Michael had spoken but few, and calm words in reply. Touching with a finger on the hilt of the great sword that hung at his side, he had said simply, "I smote them through the back-bone; a stroke which bringeth instant death. They were devouring, and saw me not, till the blade was falling. There is nought to boast of. Let us not speak farther of this; for I would forget it all. I loved that gentle horse, almost as a brother; and his cry of terror and agony will ring long in mine ear. Let us speak no word more of it."

With thankful hearts acknowledging the protection of their God, long time, therefore, they had walked on in silence, till, like a flash of fire on the horizon, had first come on Zadok's eye the gilded statue on the summit of the cloud-cleaving tower of Babel. Then had arisen the voice of the old man, pouring forth the denunciations of the prophets; and exulting, as he pronounced



their fastness at hand. But fatigue and thirst ~~making~~ <sup>making</sup> silence him. Onward as they toiled, still kept he his eyes on the great pile, rising slowly above the horizon; and, ever and anon, broke forth his threatening voice; but again, parched and worn, he was compelled to drag on in silence.

They had labored onward during an hour or more, in almost uninterrupted silence, when, suddenly, a darkness began to gather about them; and the heat became almost suffocating.

"The whirlwind from the desert!" exclaimed Michael: "down, down, with face to the ground; or the sands will choke thee."

While yet speaking, he assisted the old man to lie down; and then stretched himself in the like position beside him.

"Keep mouth and eyes shut," he said, "and endure with patience. At this distance from the sand-ocean, the peril will be lessened. From the moment that thou hearest the voice of the wind coming on, utter not a word, or it may bring death. I hear it now; as thou wouldst live, be silent."

A roar, as of the sea in a tempest, broke the stillness; and every moment waxed louder and louder. A great blast fell upon them, heavy and strong as a breaking billow; yet, in the next moment, the old man was half lifted from the ground. But the hand of Michael was on his garment, and dragged him back. In the deafening uproar, still could they hear the crash of

trunks, snapped like twigs ; and the heavy sweeping of large trees, torn up, as though the whirlwind would make of them besoms of destruction. Louder and deeper grew the roar. Now, their bodies felt borne down, as beneath a heavy weight ; and now, as if, lighter than cork, they were raised from the ground, and floating on the arrow-swift stream of wind beneath them. With difficulty could Zadok keep his lower limbs stretched out ; for the blast seemed, like a strong wrestler, to lay hold of them. Like a weed on the marge of a quiet sea, which each advancing ripple lifts gently, and moves on,—even so, with every wave of wind that broke upon them, spite of all his endeavours to remain motionless, did he feel his body lifted, and washed altogether along. With the bellow of the whirlwind, joined, at length, a chorus of thunder-peals ; and, even through their closed eye-lids, came the flare of thick-shooting lightnings.

Michael had, before, encountered the terror, even in the desert itself, where the peril and the fury were far greater ; and, for himself alone, would now have calmly waited the passing of the whirlwind, as he would have waited the cessation of a heavy rain : but, for his aged relative, he felt keenly anxious ; and the more so, that question could not be put ; nor any kind of comfort, or encouragement offered. Zadok himself was, indeed, terrified to excess ; for it seemed to him as though heaven and earth were mingling in one

ruin : but silently he prayed to that God who had opened for Israel a broad road through the depths of the sea : and felt himself, after a while, in great measure calmed ; and humbly resigned to what fate soever Heaven might decree.

Long, long seemed to him the duration of the tempest. " Surely," thought he, " the night will fall, ere the storm have passed ; and where, then, shall we lay our heads ! " Yet, from the first blast of the tempest, to the hoarse roar with which it suddenly shot off, not one hour would the dial have marked.

" Arise, my beloved uncle," said at length the cheering voice of Michael, as, having himself leaped up, he now stooped to give aid to the old man. " The Fury hath passed ; and the sky is again clear as sapphire."

" And hot as flame," said Zadok, as he gained his feet, and looked round on the broken trunks, and torn-up shrubs and trees. " This hath been terrible," he said. " Would that the rain had fallen, to cool this furnace of air and earth. But let us on."

Two hours more of toil ; and Zadok then felt, that to proceed much farther would be impossible. The shade of a broad thick oak, at length, was a temptation that he could not resist.

" I must rest me here, or sink, Michael," he said. Flinging down his staff, as he spake, he put one knee gently on the earth ; leaned forward on both hands ; turned slowly ; and then stretched

himself, with feet apart, and arms wide spread, on the cool and delicious moss. Michael opened one of the leopard-skin bags, which he had carried on his arm since the loss of their horses; took forth a leathern bottle; and, stooping, offered it to Zadok.

"Thou mayst drink it all," he said, "for now our labor draweth to an end. Nay, I have no need," he continued, as the old man, having moderately tasted, begged Michael to drink also; "in less than an hour after we quit this place, we may reach the Persian camp; and there will all our wants be satisfied. Drink it up, therefore; and may it refresh and strengthen thee!"

Eagerly did the parched lips of the old man again welcome the delicious draught. He drained the bottle to the last drop: heaved a long sigh of gratification; and again stretched himself as before; his limbs seeming to thirst for rest, as his palate had thirsted for water.

"Thou art a man of iron, not of flesh, Michael," he said, at length, with voice that seemed to denote the approach of sleep. "Spite of this toilsome journey, and burning sun, there standest thou, looking forth upon the distance, still as a statue; when this delicious moss-bed inviteth thee to rest. Yet two hours, methinks, wanteth it still of sunset; and one of them, thou sayst, will bring us to the camp of Cyrus: lie thee down therefore for a while; and my own bed will then seem the softer."

"I stand beside thee, my beloved uncle," was the reply, "because I have no need to rest; and I look forth into the distance, because I hear at times the far-off voice of the lion. Wiser were it that we linger not here too long. Better, by the full hour-glass, too soon, than, by the dropping of one sand-grain, too late."

"Lend me thy hand," said Zadok, slowly rising; "for verily would I not again confront yon terrors of the waste; even though the arm of Michael, and the sword of Samson are here to protect me."

He was quickly on his feet; and in silence they resumed their journey.

"Over yon cedar-crowned hill lieth our way," said Michael, at length, pointing toward a gentle eminence, some few furlongs distant. Beneath the shadow of those majestic trees,—co-eval, men say, with the Deluge,—may we rest in safety; for there is the frequent haunt of man; there hath the tent of the Babylonian been often pitched, when he desired to drink in the cool air, and to refresh himself with silence, as well as with delicacies for the palate; and there doth the Persian now oftentimes indulge, and look out across the plain, like a lion glaring at the distant prey; for, full in view, seeth he thence the rich bride that he longeth to embrace, with arms of steel: the great queen, the harlot rather, of the East; the God-doomed city, Babylon."

With quicker step, hearing these words, Zadok

now went on. New strength seemed to be growing within him: his eye brightened,—his lips were compressed and firm: his form became almost erect. Strongly striking his staff on the ground, he walked vigorously up the ascent,—shaded already from the sun; and at length, with beating heart, and hurried breath, reached the summit.

But heart and breath at once seemed stopped, as the wonders of that vision burst upon him. With unsteady foot, hastily he paused; and his widely dilated eyes were like those of one before whom suddenly rises a sight of more than earthly grandeur. His face turned pale; he trembled in every limb. Michael saw how the astonishment had shaken him; and placed the old man's hand upon his own strong arm; but spake not a word; and, for a time, they remained in silence. Beneath the thick roof of dark cedar-boughs they stood, as in a twilight temple: but all beyond was in a blaze of golden light. The sunshine was no longer felt as a fire to dry up the blood; but as a celestial glory, transmuting earth to heaven.

First object to seize the eye, was that most wondrous structure, fully visible now, from base to summit,—pile soaring o'er pile, till it might almost seem that the impious purpose of its builders had been near accomplishment; and that men might indeed go up well nigh unto heaven itself. The sense ached, and giddiness came, as, measuring tower after tower, the eye went upward; and fixed, at last, on the gilded statue of Bel, gigantic

in size, yet, from that dread altitude, showing, in the bright sun-beam, as but a small image, glowing from the fire.

"I am overwhelmed," exclaimed Zadok at length, in a deep husky tone, little above a whisper. "Do I not look upon that very tower, built by the impious ones? Surely, beyond this, no power of man can have gone! Yet our sacred books, Michael, instruct us, that the wicked work was stayed by the immediate hand of the Almighty. Tell me, if aught thou canst, how this may be."

"The tower thou seest," replied Michael, "is even the same that was built by the presumptuous giant race; that they might scale the sky, and bid defiance to God, should he send another deluge to drown the world: the same, yet not throughout. The incensed Deity, as thou knowest, smote with his lightnings its proud top; and with his thunderings shook it to its foundations; so that, when the confusion came upon men's tongues, and no man might understand the word of his fellow man, the work was deserted, and stood long time as a ruin. But, in years after, that wondrous queen Semiramis, powerful over all the East, gathered together the myriads; and rebuilt it, even as now thou beholdest it; and so that no eye can see where endeth the old work of the giant brood, and where beginneth that of her cunning workmen. Our Scriptures tell us, that of brick and bitumen was the old Babel formed; and still, from founda-

tion to summit, of furnace-brick and bitumen is yonder tower construct. I have stood nigh unto its base, and looked up, till the gilded form on its top seemed as a star. I have walked around, and measured its girth ; and looked upon, and touched the iron-hard bricks, made from the slime of the Deluge ; and still, as they seem, durable as the fresh-hewn blocks of granite."

" And the measure of its girth, what was it ? " asked Zadok.

" Of the low base,—a perfect square,—eight furlongs is the girth," replied Michael. " In midst of this base, riseth the first tower ; looking hence, as thou seest, like a huge precipitous rock. One furlong on each side of its square, and one furlong in height, are its dimensions ; of itself alone, therefore, a fabric is it such as the world beside cannot shew. Yet, above that, a second tower thou seest,—some two score of feet only, less in width, and in height, than the first. A third then beholdest thou ; and still, in but like proportion, less wide and lofty : then up, up, up, still upward toileth thine eye, till the eighth tall tower is reached ; and thy very brain, if like mine at the first, feeleth giddy."

" My limbs seem as they would fail me," replied Zadok, leaning more heavily on the arm of his nephew ; and pressing his right hand upon his eyes. " But,"—after a short silence,—“ see I not stairs around the towers," he asked, " stairs that go up even to the last cloud-piercing tower of



all? and, if stairs they be, where liveth the man who, without engendering madness, could either climb, or descend them, looking down on such eye-dimming depth?"

"Stairs they be," answered Michael, "ascending from each platform to the platform above it: and few men be there, I trow, who, with steady brain, could look down from the topmost height; or even from half-way up the ascent. Yet are the steps wide, and safe; and walled in, so that to fall over were impossible."

"Scarcely more impossible," said Zadok, shuddering, "than to me it would be to look down. I must close my eyes, and rest a brief space, ere I gaze upon aught else; for I feel in a giddy whirl, almost as I might be, if, carried away by a great eagle above the clouds, I had suddenly felt that his talons were loosening their hold."

He ceased; sat down upon a rude stone seat; covered his face with both hands; and remained for a short time in silence. Rising at length, refreshed, he stood up, and again looked forth upon the unequalled spectacle. One glance his eye unwillingly cast upon the brain-oppressing Babel; then wandered delightedly, as over a great sea of majestic architecture; over palace, tower, and temple; wide streets, running straight as the arrow's course from North to South, from West to East; vast squares, gardens, and throngs of umbrageous trees, all loaded with golden light; and, girding in the whole, tower-crowned walls,

like huge sea-cliffs; on whose giddy top might even then be seen the flash of chariot-wheels careering, and the bright glitter of men clothed in mail of brass, and of steel. To the North, what seemed as a ribbon of pale blue light, came from distance over the plain; and disappeared as it touched the wall: to the South, right opposite, it appeared again, as from the wall, and wandered far over the level lands, till lost in distance.

"The Euphrates," said Michael, in reply to the first enquiry which, with subdued voice, and after long silence, the old man felt able to make. "Right through the city, from North to South direct, the river taketh its course."

"And that vast edifice, near to the Babel Tower, —what is that?"

"The palace built by Nimrod, as men say;" replied Michael: "Nimrod, the mighty hunter of men, of whom our Scriptures speak. Hoary indeed in age it sheweth, yet mighty; though, since the foundations thereof were laid, seventeen times a hundred years have come and gone like clouds."

"And that, still vaster, a space beyond it, —what is that?"

"A glorious structure in truth it is," said Michael, "though its birth as but of yesterday. That enormous fabric, a palace, at once, and fortress; and, of itself, larger than many a goodly walled town, is the work of Nitocris, the queen-mother; mother of the present foul tyrant of

Assyria ; but great and good, as he is despicable and wicked. Our Daniel hath long found favor in her sight ; for his righteousness, and for the wisdom, more than man's, with which he did interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar ; and did boldly foretell to the proud king, that his rule should be taken from him ; that he should be driven forth from the habitations of men ; and should eat the grass of the field, even as an ox."

"And with the king, then, hath Daniel favor also?"

Michael shook the head. "As the robber and murderer holdeth not willingly discourse with the upright magistrate, even so this unrighteous man, not of good will would hear the voice of the prophet of the Holy God of Israel ; that God of whom he maketh his mock."

"But before whose vengeance, if our prophets have not seen false visions,—in little while shall he roar and howl ;"—exclaimed the old man hastily.—"Yet, Michael," he proceeded, after short silence, and with low solemn tone ; "looking now on yonder walls, high and thick as rocks ; on yon gates of brass, that, even hence, look strong enough to endure an earthquake's battery,—doth not thy secret mind within thee ask, 'How shall this mighty Babylon fall before the sword ? whence shall come the strength that shall smite her to the knee, and make her bow down ; and shall put the fetters upon her ?' Verily doth this sight stir the spirit to marvel, and to ask, 'Can these things

come to pass ?' And yet," he added, with stronger voice, and with look of confidence, "I doubt not; I cannot doubt; I will not doubt,—for the word hath been spoken; and surely shall it be fulfilled. I *see* not how this shall be; nor can I conceive of it. Well then may I marvel, and ask, how may it be brought about. But, even while I ask, and marvel, a voice, as of God, soundeth within my heart, and saith, 'Have I not spoken it? Know I not the way thereof?' And look, Michael, look! Verily till this moment I saw them not; so did yon great city steal away mine eyes,—look at the mighty armament that standeth against it; that seemeth to have compassed it, as with a net! Look at the trenches dug before it, as for graves unto the heathen! Look at the tents, thousands upon thousands, whence will go forth the armies, like clouds of locusts for their multitude! Behold! like a broad river of bright steel and brass, where the cavalry cometh on from the South! The earth shaketh beneath the stamping of their hoofs; Their ensigns are as flame; their spear-points are thick as a host of glittering stars! Hark to the neighing of their horses, as if they smelt the battle! Hark to the clamor of their trumpets, that call as though they would awaken the dead; or bring down yonder huge walls to the ground, even as fell down, before Joshua, the walls of Jericho, at the blowing of the rams' horns!"

Suddenly he sank upon his knees; "God of

Israel," he cried, with folded hands looking up to heaven ; " I feel now that thy hand is indeed put forth ; and that the day of our deliverance draweth nigh ! Thou wilt shew mercy unto thy long-suffering people ! Thou wilt bring us forth from the house of bondage ! Thou wilt give unto us again our inheritance of old ! Jerusalem shall arise from out her ashes ! Thy temple shall stand again, glorious on the holy mountain ; and a voice shall go forth therefrom, even to the uttermost ends of the earth ! "

He sank forward ; lay prostrate with face to the ground for a while ; then arose, pale, and calm ; and again fixed his eyes on the great city ; red now, as with actual blood, beneath the fiery glow of the fast-sinking sun.

While thus rapt in wonder he stood, Michael at length laid a hand on his shoulder, and warned him that it would be prudent to remain there no longer. " The distance hence to the camp is indeed as nought," he pursued ; " but darkness falleth quickly after the sun hath gone down ; and we may find the path, at times, unsafe for the foot."

Instantly they began to descend the hill.

" Thou hast more of the soldier's spirit than I, my beloved uncle," said Michael, smiling, as he looked on the now serene, yet lofty face of the old man ; and recalled the burning words, the ardent tones, the animated look and gesture, with which he had greeted the first sight of the

vast beleaguering force of Cyrus. "Could but the dial of Time be put back for thee some two score years, yonder camp, methinks, would this night have another soldier, eager as any therein to rush upon the spear, or to batter against the gates."

"Nay, Michael, I think not so," returned Zadok. "Yet no man knoweth his own heart. I felt, indeed, while I looked forth but now, as never before I felt: a madness it may have been: but it hath passed: and my trust now is, not in the might of man, the sword, the spear, and the war-horse; but in the power and the mercy of God. I feel, Michael, I feel in the depth of my soul, that the sun of Israel is about to arise; that the decree of Jehovah is gone forth; and that yonder hosts are the instrument through which the great work will be done. God grant that it be done quickly!"

A long silence followed; and each was soon in earnest meditation upon what the next day might bring forth. Zadok thought upon his imprisoned brother Adad; dearly beloved still, though for thirty long years they had not seen each other. He pictured to himself the joy with which he would quit the odious dungeon, and spring to the arms of his deliverer. In fancy he imaged the loving wife, the daughter, the sickly son,—none of whom he had ever beheld,—rushing forward to embrace the released husband and father. He heard their voices, in the

tumult of that great joy. He felt the embraces, he heard the loving words, with which he should himself be welcomed, after that first rapturous hurry should have subsided.

The thoughts of Michael, too, were on his beloved father; on his mother, his keenly sensitive sister, his weak and ailing brother: but there was one other form and face, which floated evermore before his inward eye, like a visitant from heaven, rather than aught of earthly mould, — Naomi, the grand-daughter of Zedekiah, once king of Jerusalem. To her had Michael been betrothed: and to him was she as the breath of life. "But for the loss of our horses, even at this very hour," thought he, "I might have breathed the air made holy by her presence."

The meditations of both were suddenly broken by the challenge of a sentinel.

"We are travellers from Jerusalem," said Michael; "and desire to come into the presence of prince Cyrus."

"Ye will have to render reason wherefore ye should be admitted to him," was the reply; "but ye will be questioned again. Pass on through the third rank of tents, toward your left; and, after a while, ye will see the pavilion before you."

The travellers returned thanks, and went onward; hearing all around a vast hum of voices; and, through the brief, fast-waning twilight, beholding groups of soldiers, who stood in talk

together; or sauntered along, in the enjoyment of the cooler air.

"May we not be in peril among these rough men?" said Zadok, in low tone. "Methinks I have heard, that the soldier, in the darkness, is not always better companion than the robber, in mid-day."

"Have thou no fear," Michael replied. "Against the soldier of any other general, caution could not be too active, and ceaseless; but, under Cyrus, the moral discipline is exercised, not less than that of the body. Though he knoweth not himself the laws and the worship of the only true God, yet is the love of virtue, of all that is noble in conduct, a principle of his very being; and that which is a law to himself, he striveth to make the law of conduct unto all. Touching the soldiery of the many nations now bound together under his single rule, I would not, indeed, aver, that every man would be obedient to the moral, as to the military authority of this great prince; since fewer have been the opportunities, and much shorter the time for due instruction: but, for the soldiers of his own country, Persia,—and among those only shall we be this night,—for, from the Cedar-hill I beheld the pavilion of the prince, and thitherward directed our course,—for the soldiers of Persia, I say boldly,—not a lie, not a theft, not an act of drunkenness, throughout this camp, wouldst thou hear of in the course of a moon. This great moral, as well as military



discipline it is, that hath rendered the Persian soldiery irresistible: and thus it is that the virtue of one man createth, as it might seem, a copy of that virtue in the minds of myriads; even as the light of one great lamp shineth in the eyes, and directeth the steps, of ten thousand men, who might else have wandered in darkness."

Discoursing thus, they walked on, among a crowd of soldiers, cheerful and talkative; who, though many of them looked earnestly at the tall form, and herculean limbs of Michael, offered not the slightest molestation, nor spake word of offence; till, at length, arriving at a wider space, they beheld before them a tent, or pavilion, of great size, the glowing drapery of which showed that it was already lighted up within.

Unlike the watch that would have guarded the tent of a despot, amid soldiers who loved him not, the sentries round the pavilion of Cyrus were few, and unsuspecting. The travellers were readily permitted to pass to the door of the tent. Beside it stood two soldiers, resting each his hand upon his spear; and to them Michael addressed himself. "Let it be said to prince Cyrus, that Michael, the son of Adad, craveth to stand before him."

No reply was made; but one of the soldiers drew aside the curtain of the tent, and gave the message to a man who stood within. Almost instantly the attendant returned, and desired the travellers to enter.

The tent, brilliantly lighted by lamps, fed with

naphtha, was spacious enough, it seemed, to give ample room for two hundred men, or more; but, at that moment, its occupants were some six or seven only; seated in two groups, at separate tables. No time, however, was permitted the visitors for more particular observation; since their attention was immediately attracted by the entrance, through a curtain at the farther extremity of the tent, of a man who, though most plain in his military habiliments, bore on his countenance, in his form, in his every movement, the attestation that he was one of Nature's kings.

In person he was tall, and finely proportioned; and looked still active and strong, though three score years had passed over him. His long hair, and beard of rich auburn, were as yet scarcely touched by the grey of Time; and his large full eyes were bright and clear as dark sapphire. The commanding figure, the noble face, the lofty crown, the dome-like brow, the rich-toned voice, deep, strong, yet musical; the beaming eye, the eloquent-seeming lip,—all struck upon the enthusiastic mind of Zadok a conviction, that he beheld then really before him, the man pre-ordained of God, and by Israel's prophets foretold, as the conqueror of the wicked city, and the deliverer of the chosen people. As before a being of a higher nature, then, he knelt, and fell upon his face.

"Ha! my young Samson," cried Cyrus, as with open arms he advanced to meet Michael; "Welcome, welcome, thrice and ten times welcome."

he continued, while embracing, and kissing him on either cheek; "by my faith, have I oft this day been longing to behold thee. Art thou come at last, then, to go on with me against yonder Philistines? Say not nay,—for, in good sooth, the day is drawing on, when strong arms and hearts will be worth more than gold and jewels."

"No, Cyrus," said Michael; "well do I hope that for the last time I have drawn sword in human strife. I come to thee, in part, because I desired again to see thy face, and hear thy voice; in part that I may make known unto thee one who . . . ."

Turning while he spake, that he might take Zadok by the hand, while presenting him to the prince, he saw that he had prostrated himself; and the motive he easily guessed. Stooping, he touched him on the shoulder; and, whispering, bade him arise.

"This, I suppose," said Cyrus, with kind smile and gentle tone, "is thy Manoah, my young friend; and as such . . . ."

"Not my father," interrupted Michael, "but mine uncle Zadok of Jerusalem, the brother of my father."

"Right welcome still," said Cyrus, holding forth his hand; "but let him know," he whispered, "that prostrations, and even bendings of the knee, howsoever esteemed by vain kings, are to me little pleasing."

"I bowed before thee, prince," said Zadok,

stooping his venerable head, and crossing his arms over his breast,—for he had heard the whisper,—“not as to one high in place, and demanding the incense of servile adulation;—not as to even the great leader in battle; the son of a king, and the heir to his throne: I bowed not before thee for these things, Cyrus; but because I saw, and knew in thee, the special, the long-foretold instrument of God, to the redemption of Israel from captivity. Reverentially, then, I grasp the hand which thou dost proffer; and on our God I call, to bless, and guard thee evermore.”

“I thank thee,” replied Cyrus, smiling, and warmly shaking the hand of Zadok; “thy God, indeed, the God of the Jews, is not he before whom I worship;—in name, at least, is he not; for, of his attributes, his abode, his whole mode of being, I have not put question: but, from what God soever man humbly and sincerely prays for protection and blessing, surely his prayer will be received by that infinite Power, the God of all gods, for whom it was intended; though, in ignorance, perhaps wrongfully addressed. Your God, ye name Jehovah; ours call we Belus. Slight matter what the name, if that we *mean* be a Truth. But, indeed, I would fain, at fitting time, learn from you somewhat more, touching that God whom ye worship; his origin, his power, his mode of government; and also touching those forms of adoration which ye deem acceptable to him.”

"Our God," said Zadok, with eyes and hands uplifted, and speaking with voice as of authority ; "our God hath had no origin. He is, in Himself, of all the Great Original : the one only God, from eternity to eternity : the Creator, the Upholder, the Director of all things !"

"Well, well my friend," said Cyrus, good humouredly ; "let us not now dispute about such matters. The Greeks, a great people, say that their god Jupiter is the son of an elder god, Saturn : and that Saturn was the progeny of some Power, still older ; and that Power again, doubtless, they suppose to have been the offspring of some other Power, still more remote. The Assyrians, the Persians, the men of India, have all their peculiar gods ; to whom they give different names, and impute different powers ; and to whom, with differing forms, they offer worship. Which of all these is the right God, who shall judge ? These things, I fear, must be for evermore beyond the bounds of man's apprehension ; and, at the point where knowledge ends, and tradition appears as a fable, there must man's feeble mind rest in humble belief ; and that belief most naturally will be, in the doctrines, or the dogmas, which have been instilled as eternal truths into each man's infant mind. Ample cause, then, is there for diversity of creeds ; and reason sufficient, therefore, for charitable toleration of all doctrines, and forms of worship, the intention of which is to give honor to the gods, and to teach men the practice of virtue.

That your god is the one only deity ; that he hath had no father, but hath existed throughout all the inconceivable depth of eternity, seemeth, no doubt, to those of other creeds, incredible, impossible ; because the belief instilled into them from childhood, is, in a number of gods, each proceeding from some earlier god, far, far back in the deep of ages. But their belief, so different from that wrought in the very substance of your infant minds, must doubtless appear to you not less incredible and impossible, than doth yours to them. We may, then, with justice, and with fitness, express to each other our conflicting opinions ; but no man can, with justice or decency, enforce upon another man the profession of a belief, or the forms of a worship, which in his soul, whether rightly or wrongly, that man feeleth to be false. There is one doctrine, however, my friends, on which no sane and good man *can* doubt,—that all men should be just, honorable, charitable towards each other ; thankful and reverential towards the great Power, or Powers unknown, that rule earth and heaven. But enough of this now : at some other time we may, I trust, have opportunity to talk farther concerning such great matter : and believe me, my friends, though ye may find me dull, ye shall not find me obstinate : for if ye can shew to me aught which my soul feeleth to be a truth, my tongue shall openly confess it as such."

"I looked for nought else from thee, Cyrus," said Zadok ; "for thou art not as one of the com-

mon race of men ; but art predestined for a great work, in which the God of Israel will be glorified. Surely, then, thou wilt not be permitted to remain in heathen darkness ; but wilt cast away from thee the false gods whom thou hast worshipped, and wilt . . . .”

“Stay, stay, my good friend,” interrupted the prince, smiling benevolently ; and, with a slight pressure and gentle shake, laying his hand on the shoulder of the speaker : “I have not called thine a false god ;—wherefore, then, shouldst thou, without proof, and without charity, malign those in which I have been trained to believe? Let us shake hands, my friend, and do unto each other,—as, indeed, unto all men,—every good that may be in our power ; but not make war upon each other’s minds, by thrusting through a sincere belief the poisoned sword of contemptuous and angry vituperation. However, not a word more of this for the present occasion. Thou hast said more than once, my good friend, that I have been appointed by your God for some great work : and have been foretold by your prophets. On this matter let us, at some future time, have speech together : but, now, the questions that require answer are, whence come ye, whither go ye, and in what can I render to you service?”

“Frankly,” replied Michael, “the service first and most instantly acceptable, would be, to set before us food and wine ; and the second, to command that we may have beds appointed to us for the night. We have toiled during many hours

upon foot, and beneath a burning sun, and with but scant supply of sustenance."

Cyrus clapped his hands; and two or three survivors instantly appeared from rooms within.

"Let the supper-board be spread, and with speed," he said to them. "But why spake ye not this sooner, my good friends? I could not, by instinct, know that ye had toiled thus, and were fasting: and, verily, to a tired and hungry man,—such is our poor mortal nature,—the choicest wisdom of discourse hath slight relish, compared to the savour of the stewed kid. But sit ye down, both of you, and rest your limbs."

He motioned them to a superb couch; seated himself opposite to them on a small stool; and instantly pursued. "And now, once again, let me ask of you, whence ye come, whither ye go, and in what fashion can I render service unto you?"

"We come from Jerusalem," began Michael.

"From Jerusalem?" cried Cyrus: "said ye not that ye journeyed on foot?"

"Since noon only have we so travelled," replied Michael. "We lost our horses by the savage beast."

"Well for you that ye lost not your lives also! but tell me how this befel."

Michael made no reply; but he sighed heavily. Zadok, therefore, rising, and standing close before the prince, in few low words told of what had happened to them.

"Ay, ay, ay," whispered Cyrus, with repeated



slight noddings of the head. "I see it all : I know him well. Iron arm, heart of down : a raging tempest in battle ; by the sick bed, a mother's hush-song. But what then, my good friend Michael," he said aloud, "what can have been the affair that called thee to Jerusalem ? and wherefore, since thou must have passed through the camp of thy ever grateful debtor, wherefore camest thou not to him on thy way ; whether for brief discourse only, or, perchance, for aid, if such he might have means to render thee ?"

"I passed through thy camp, Cyrus," replied Michael, "before the sun had risen. I was alone, on foot, and in haste : nor was there aught in which I could justly ask thy aid or counsel."

"I must hear farther of this," returned Cyrus : "but the board, I see, is well nigh spread. I have myself supped ; and must withdraw to indite a letter. But here are friends of mine, who will join you at the meal ; and in cheerful converse afterwards."

He walked towards one of the tables, at which were seated two persons, so deeply engaged in playing at dice, that they had not noticed the entrance of strangers. Laying a hand upon the shoulder of one of them, a man attired in a loose robe of silk, profusely embroidered ; and whose fingers, as he handled the dice, glittered with rings of gold, set with jewels, "My Cræsus," he said kindly, "art thou so rapt in this new invention of thy country, that neither the entrance of a sterling

friend, nor even the savour of the supper preparing, sufficeth to arouse thee?"

A face wearing the marks of some five and fifty years, yet still strikingly handsome, and intellectual, though slightly effeminate and pleasure-worn, looked up to the speaker. His right hand was, at the moment, raised, in act to throw the dice; and his look expressed a faint, though good-humoured, impatience at the interruption.

"By Jupiter, Cyrus, thou didst startle me," he said; "and now, in faith, I scent the fume of the meats. But what friend, then, say'st thou . . . ha! my young Hercules of Thymbra," he cried suddenly, as, turning round, he caught sight of Michael, and, with open arms, advanced to embrace him. "By Juno, Pallas, and Mars, but I am a very beast not to have felt, even without seeing him, that so true a friend was nigh. Art thou come, then, to draw sword once more against the Babylonian?"

Michael shook the head.

"Well, well, so much the better then for Belshazzar: though down he must at last before the conqueror of us all. But come now,—let me see once more the mighty blade, that smote the hosts of the Philistines, in the hand of that terrible Samson, thy ancestor; and that did execution scarcely less, I trow, in thine own hand, on yonder fearful plain."

While speaking, he took hold of the sheath with his left hand; and, with the right, looking in the

face of Michael for permission, slowly drew out the huge weapon. Yet, while he held it forth, for his own gaze, and that of the rest, he almost appeared to shrink from it. Nothing could be less formed for show; nothing more fitted for war's grim work. The handle was of brass; the blade, extremely broad, thick, and heavy, though not long, was of dark steel, over which, as on the under side of a leaf, meandered thousands of delicate lines. Turning it round and round; drawing his finger along the edge, or pressing the point upon the ground, though failing to bend it, he seemed lost in admiration of the famous weapon.

"The best workman of Damascus," he said at length, "could not, in these degenerate days, produce sword fit to compare with this: but the edge, my friend Michael, should be brought to the grindstone; for, methinks, some of the helmet and cuirass cleaving of that day, hath left tokens upon it; and, against the new day, it should have the new edge; or less may be the wonder of its work."

"That new day, I trust, will never come," replied Michael, holding forth his hand, as if desirous to sheathe the sword, and escape from the subject.

"Thou knowest not, Croesus," said Cyrus, smiling, "what it is that thou holdest in thy hand, and so earnestly dost admire."

"Yea, Cyrus," replied the Lydian king, "'tis the sword of that invincible Israelite, Samson; who, as it is said, even with the jaw-bone of an ass, slew

a thousand Philistines, that lay in wait to kill him : what, then, might he not have done with this weapon, which seemeth as though, in such hand, it might cut through a rock."

"Ay, my Crœsus," returned the prince ; "thou knowest *what* it is ; and, in part, what it hath done, in days of old ; but perchance thou knowest not that, in that blade, an oracle of our day might have read the most momentous event of thine own life. But for that sword, and the arm that wielded it, Cyrus might have found his grave on the field of Thymbra : and they who were vanquished there, might then perhaps have been the vanquishers : and thrones that fell there, might have risen to a glory and power greater than ever before : and that dominion which, by the favor of the gods, hath since then stood highest, might have been cast down amid the lowest. Such, my Crœsus, might have been the great matters concerning which a true oracle might have spoken to thee, had he read aright the fates linked with that sword."

"Well, Cyrus, well," replied the Lydian king, placidly smiling, as he returned the blade to its owner ; "it might have been as thou sayest ; and Crœsus might have been throned on that eminence where now sits his greater far ; but, with truth do I avow, that, as the beloved friend and companion of Cyrus ; or even, as some will have it, his willing captive, happier am I than when, rolling in riches, and steeped in the adulations of myriads, I stood

among the proudest of Eastern kings. Thorns were then in my crown; and cares, like stinging adders, haunted my bed. I live now as a philosopher; knowing the real value of this world's possessions; and esteeming health, leisure, and a calm mind, more than power and vain glory. I am thy debtor, therefore, my Cyrus, for having, though by force, taught me to know that which is man's best knowledge."

"Save always," replied the prince, taking the hand of Cræsus, and warmly pressing it, "save always that higher knowledge which concerns man in his relation to the gods. But the board, I see, is spread; and our good visitors here," giving a hand each to Michael and Zadok, "are wearied and hungry. Come, my friends,"—walking with them toward the table,—“eat, drink, and let your hearts be glad: for, believe me, a cloud is even now above the horizon, which, ere long, will bring upon your parched-up lands the fertilizing rains. Thou art known, Michael, to my friends here, Gobryas, and Gadates," presenting them to each other; "and also, as I think, to my younger friend, Prince Tigranes. Make them, then, known to thine uncle; and, believe me, he will, after supper, find them well stored with matters for rational discourse. Other than such, indeed, would not, if rightly I judge his nature, be acceptable to him. Soon as thou hast supped, Michael," he added, in low tone, "leave thine uncle with our companions here; and come to me in my private

tent ; for I have matter of deepest moment for thy reflection. The gods be with you, my friends," he said, waving his hand, and speaking to all with cheerful voice. "A good appetite, a good digestion, and sound repose to all. Good night."

He walked rapidly to the farther extremity of the tent ; drew aside a curtain, and passed out.

## CHAPTER II.

THE look and tone of Cyrus had so strongly impressed Michael with a conviction of the profound importance of the matters, whatsoever they might be, concerning which he had desired to speak privately with him, that he could give but slight attention to the discourse going on among his companions after they had seated themselves at table; or even to the supper itself, though both hunger and thirst were strong upon him. He ate, indeed, though almost unconsciously, of the food set before him; and twice or thrice emptied the silver cup of delicious wine: but, to such words as were occasionally spoken to him, he answered almost without knowledge of what had been said: and, as soon as the meal was ended, rose from his tall chair; bowed silently to all, and withdrew.

No sooner had he disappeared through the curtain-door that led to the private tent of Cyrus, than Cræsus, with a gentle laugh, and brightly beaming eye, began,

“A wager, my friends, with any one of you,—or with all.”

“On what matter?” asked Tigranes, son of the king of Armenia; a man of singular beauty,

both of face and person; and endowed, not less, with the nobler distinctions of mind and disposition: "on what matter, Crœsus?"

"I offer wager," replied the Lydian king, "first,—that Cyrus will hold discourse with yonder young Samson concerning the coming stroke,—whatsoever it be,—that he designeth against the city; and touching which all the officers of our camp are sorely puzzled and perplexed; secondly, that he will ask Michael to give to it the aid of his strong arm; and thirdly, that, first or last, he will draw out his consent to that request. What sayest thou, Tigranes;—a horse, or a sword, upon any one, or all of these, do I offer to wage."

"Upon no one of them will I accept wager," replied Tigranes, slightly shaking the head, and gently laughing: "for I have small doubt that he is likely to do all that thou hast said; and to succeed in his purpose."

"Were I apt to accept wager at all," said Zadok, gravely, yet kindly, "I might, if permitted, upon one of thy points make engagement with thee, king Crœsus. That the noble Cyrus may, in part, open to my nephew a design which it might be imprudent to make known to all, readily can I credit; since well may he be assured that, in the keeping of Michael, such secret would be safe as in his own: but, that he will persuade him again to draw sword in battle, I have no expectance; so utterly loathsome is now to him all shedding of blood."



"But, good Zadok," returned Croesus, "how, save by the sword, can man right himself against the wrong-doer, and the oppressor? Truly a great boon would it be to the robber and the tyrant, to teach all good men rather to submit, than to spill blood: but the final end of such teaching would be, first,—the extermination of all the virtuous; and, finally, the extermination of the human race,—some few, perhaps, the worst, except; since, assuredly, after all the good had been destroyed by the wicked, the wicked would be destroyed by each other. And verily do I suspect, my friend Zadok," he added, after a short pause, "that yon huge weapon hath had use long since that dreadful fight of Thymbra. Mine eyes deceived me, or the blood-spots that I saw upon the blade, must have come thither within but few days, at farthest. Ye have journeyed from Jerusalem, ye say; and not likely is it that, in times so disturbed, ye can have encountered no enemy by the way. Confess now, my friend," he pursued, smiling; "upon how many robbers, or wild Arabs, hath that sword-edge been laid, since ye left the desolate city?"

"Upon not one," replied Zadok; "for cautiously did we shun, when we could, all approach to man, save the shepherd, or the husbandman. We were, indeed, this day fearfully exposed to death, from the sudden attack of two prodigious lions: and their blood, or that of our poor horses, —so mangled that Michael in mercy slew them,—

must it be that hath spotted the sword. This night, when he sleepeth, will I wash off the stains."

"Two lions?" exclaimed Cræsus, with a lurking smile, though his whole face beamed astonishment: "Why, my good Zadok, thou speakest of the blood of lions upon thy nephew's sword-blade, indifferently as might priest, of the blood of lambs upon the knife of sacrifice! Rehearse, rehearse fully this thing unto us now; for truly such come not in every day's report."

Not unwillingly, yet still with that love of simplicity and truth which forbade all swell of exaggeration, Zadok narrated to his wondering and admiring listeners the event of that morning; so brief in its duration, yet so terrific. When he had ended, they sat for a while gazing in each other's faces; and so deep was the sudden silence that, from the summit of the city wall, came distinctly the voices and the laughter of drunkards, and the shrill scream of women.

"By Mars!" said Cræsus at length, with voice scarcely more than a whisper, and with a cold shudder running through his whole body, "I would not have lain like thee, Zadok, with that boiling breath close to my face, and those blazing eyeballs blinding me, though bribed by the richest throne of earth, to take thy place! Hath Cyrus heard of this?"

"In the general, he hath; nought of the particular," replied Zadok; "for, in the presence of

Michael, I could but whisper it; and in words the fewest. But now,—for I am a stranger in this land, and know not the manner of its people,—fain would I,—if one so humble may, without offence, put question to one so great as thou,—fain would I, king Crœsus, ask of thee a certain thing.”

“Ask freely, my good Zadok,” returned the Lydian king, with a bland smile; “and, as the guest of Cyrus, I would reply to thee, wert thou even of the very humblest rank of men. But not such art thou; for, surely, there is a strain of greatness in thy very look and mien,—and, in thy discourse, is both matter and manner responsive to such quality. Art thou not, furthermore, whatsoever be thy present condition, of that blood which, in days of old, held rule among the people of Israel? Ask of me then, freely,—and not as of a king, but as of a friend to Cyrus; with whom the truest royalty is of the mind, and the heart.”

“I accept thy permission, with thanks,” rejoined Zadok, his face brightening, and his voice taking a firmer tone: “and will speak frankly. With those among whom I have lived, truth and simplicity in discourse are held higher in esteem, than courtly forms, and pleasing falsehoods. Now, king Crœsus, there were words spoken by thee this night, concerning which I gladly would know, if they were indeed the words of simple truth, or only that phrase of flattery, so pleasing unto most, even when suspected to be but flowery falsehood.”

"Say thou on," said Cræsus, kindly, when he observed that Zadok paused, as if hesitating how to proceed.

"Thou didst say," resumed the Jew,—“though I remember not word for word as thou didst speak it,—thou didst aver, that Cyrus is thy greater far; that thou wert happier, as his friend and companion; or even, according to the word of some, as his willing captive, than when thou didst abound in riches, and wert worshipped by the people, and didst sit on one of the proudest thrones of the East. Now, Cræsus, may I, offenceless, ask of thee,—is this the truth, or is it but a courtly adulation to one who, though not yet entitled king, hath power, it is said, greater than that of any monarch of the East?”

“I spake that which I believe to be the truth,” replied Cræsus, in a tone kind and candid. “No man, indeed, who knoweth Cyrus, would dream of pleasing him by the words of flattery. That he is far greater than I, or than any other living king, his whole course of life doth make manifest: for, through his unequalled genius in war, hath he not vanquished, by arms, all who stood against him in battle? and, by the force of his great virtues, and his heroic generosity, hath he not subdued, afterwards, the hearts of all who had hated him? There is now no king, powerful, loved, and feared, as Cyrus: yet Persia, his country, but a score of years back, was a small and feeble kingdom. He alone it is that hath made, of that

acorn, the great oak that now spreads its boughs over so many nations. That my words were as my thoughts, when I said that Cyrus is greater far than I, thou canst not now have question: that I myself am happier, as his friend, than I was as a rich and lauded king, I can give to thee no proof: but I can beg of thee, and of all men, to do me such courtesy as to believe that I utter that which seemeth to me the truth. I *may* be myself deceived by my thoughts; but I offer not a known deceit to other men."

"I thank thee, king Cræsus, I thank thee," replied Zadok; "and I feel that I have heard from thee the words of truth. And very pleasant is it to me that Cyrus should be thus spoken of by men who were once his enemies; for, though perhaps ye know not of it, from him doth the enslaved people of Israel look for great things."

"Thou art a stranger in this country, as thou sayest, my good Zadok," resumed Cræsus; "and, peradventure, hast not heard of the great deeds of Cyrus, even to myself; or thou wouldst scarcely have felt doubt that I spake of him with sincerity. But fill we now our cups once more; for, by my troth, we have neglected this fragrant wine of Helbon; and such rare gift of the gods we ought not to slight,—and I will then, in few words, tell thee, Zadok, in what manner it was that, from the enemy of Cyrus, I became his admiring and loving friend."

"As the gift of *God*," said Zadok, calmly, "am

I thankful for this delicious wine, as for all other blessings,—though, as thou mayst have heard, our strong ancestor, by command from heaven, drank the pure water only;—as the gift of the one only God,—for of *gods* we people of Israel know nothing,—am I thankful for it: and thankful, also, for thy goodness, king of Lydia, in thus offering to impart unto me knowledge so desirable.”

“So thou but like the wine,” replied Cræsus, with a smile, “thou mayst thank whatsoever gods, or god, thou wilt. My own worship was, from infancy, that of my country; but, after I had become known to Solon, and other of the great men of Greece, I gave to the gods the names, and the qualities attributed to the powers of heaven, by the poets and the philosophers of Greece; so that, for Baal, I pronounced Jupiter; for Mylitta, Venus; and so forth for other resembling deities. Yet, for the names, small matter is it, I trow; and, for the number, unless the gods should themselves instruct men in the truth, I see not how we can reach to any certainty of knowledge.”

“God *hath* instructed man in the truth,” said Zadok, firmly, yet respectfully: “but men have shut their ears and their eyes against it.”

“I gainsay it not,” rejoined Cræsus; “but the priests of *all* creeds proclaim that their god, or gods, have instructed them in the truth; and how, then, shall we judge amongst them? But, however, my good Zadok, let us leave this question, if

thou desire to hear of Cyrus ; lest he return, and thy wish be frustrated."

"I crave thy pardon, king," said Zadok : "I did but purpose, as I could not do otherwise, to mark my belief in the one God only : and now I pray thee to forgive me, if my zeal appeared to thee unseemly ; and to resume that discourse in which I interrupted thee."

"To the success, health, and happiness of Cyrus the Great," said Cræsus, with cheerful tone and look, as he raised the silver goblet ; "and may *thy* god," nodding to the Jew, "and my gods, and all gods whatsoever, have him in their keeping!"

The good wish was cheerfully responded to ; the cups were emptied ; and Cræsus at once began.

"I need not go back to the time when I first entered into alliance with Neriglissor, king of the Babylonians, and elder brother of that Belshazzar who now rules in Babylon,—against Cyaxares, king of Media, and the uncle of Cyrus. The Median king himself would have been but a small matter, in opposition to the great force which we took against him : but his whole army was under the sole rule of Cyrus : and, by my faith, that army moved together, as though the very limbs of all the thousands had obeyed his single will ; and every arm had struck instantly with his own. Though greatly superior in numbers, then, we were defeated in the first battle. Neriglissor was slain ; and our army sought safety in

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flight. I say nought of less important conflicts which succeeded; but go at once to that terrible field of Thymbra, in which thy nephew, Zadok, so dazzled the eyes of men, by deeds such as, in these degenerate days, men dream not of; and where I first came into the actual presence of Cyrus. Weak instrument as I may seem to thee now, my good Zadok, I was then sole commander of armies, such as have rarely combined under one head. Of my own Lydian soldiers the number was great: but, under my rule, were also hosts of the Babylonians, the Phrygians, the Cappadocians, the Cyprians, the Cilicians, the Paphlagonians, the Thracians, the Ionians. Of Egyptians alone, had I a body of a hundred and twenty thousand; men of such valor and discipline, that I deemed them invincible. Thy nephew, Zadok, was it, who first broke open their close, thick ranks, like a descending rock crushing its way through trees. Nearly half a million of men were then at my bidding; and, among them, were there, of iron and brass clothed cavalry, not less than three-score thousands. Well knew I, by the report of spies, that Cyrus had not under him, one half the strength; and was I not, when gazing on my army of strong and bold men of war, was I not justified in the hope and the expectance of victory? We met in battle. I will not consume the time with report of that which, is to the present purpose, as nought. We met like two opposing tempests. During a whole day, awful was the struggle: but,



ere night, our great army was defeated. The troops of the allied nations separated from us; and went toward their own countries: and my Lydian soldiers fled, under the shelter of darkness, to Sardis; that great city, in whose gorgeous court, rich beyond all courts of the East, I had, but few years before, received and welcomed the sages of Greece. Never shall I forget the horrors of that night's tumult! By the morning, however, we reached the city; and made preparations for defence. But, on the evening of that very day, Cyrus brought up his whole force against us; and pushed his battering engines close to the walls. Still did I deem that, for long time, should we be secure: but, in the dead of that same night, he found means to enter by a private passage; and to seize our strongest tower. At day-break, his army entered: and the Chaldeans began instantly to plunder and slay. But then shone forth the greatness of the soul of Cyrus. Calling instantly for the commanders of the Chaldean soldiers, he dismissed them at once from the army: compelled the plunderers to surrender their booty; and gave command, that not a soldier should leave the ranks. Order having been restored, and the arms of my Lydian soldiers having been given up to him,—for resistance would have been mere madness,—Cyrus ordered that the greater part of his army should leave the city, and encamp on the plain without; and then summoned me to appear before him. Knowing this noble conduct of Cyrus,

I went unto him with a cheerful mind ; for I felt that, though he was indeed a mighty conqueror, he was not a destroyer : and, when we stood face to face, I it was who first spake.

\* “ ‘ God save you, Master,’ said I,—‘ for by that name must I perforce call you.’

“ ‘ God save you also, Cræsus,’ replied he ; ‘ for we are both men, and need alike the protection of the gods. But what say you, Cræsus,—will you give me some advice?’

“ He spake this with a smile, in the manner of one friend craving counsel of another ; and in all this, both in his voice, and the expression of his look and bearing, there was so true a royalty of nature, that I felt how poor, in the comparison, was all the pomp and glitter by which common kings seek to make men worship before them. I answered, therefore, with readiness and truth, saying, that I should be willing to serve him in anything ; and that, in so doing, I had full belief that I should serve myself also.

“ ‘ Well then,’ said he, ‘ the business is this. My soldiers have endured much fatigue ; and exposed themselves to much danger : and now that they have captured what they suppose to be the richest city of Asia, Babylon alone excepted, they expect to be something the better for it ; and this,

\* This conversation betwixt Cræsus and Cyrus is taken, almost entirely, from Xenophon's *Life of Cyrus the Great*, as quaintly translated, “ *The first four Books*, by Francis Digby, late of Queen's College in Oxford ; the four last by John Norris, Fellow of All-Souls' Coll. Oxford. 1685.

I think, is but reasonable : for, if they reap no benefit from their toils and dangers, I cannot expect that they will continue to be faithful and obedient to me.'

" ' I cannot deny their right,' replied I, ' since such hath always been the usage of war.'

" ' But yet,' rejoined Cyrus, ' I am not willing to yield up the city to be plundered ; both because that would bring destruction upon it ; and because, in such pillaging, those would get the most who the least deserve it.'

" ' Then Cyrus,' said I, ' let me tell some of my Lydians, that I have prevailed with you that there shall be no plundering ; and that their wives and children shall not be dragged from them, provided the Lydians shall come, and offer you, of their own accord, whatever is of any worth in Sardis : for I am confident, if they hear this, they will bring you all the good things they have among them. But, in the first place, I would have you send to my Treasurers ; and my keepers shall surrender it up to those you employ.'

" Very well pleased indeed was Cyrus with this : and then he put question to me, concerning the answers that I had received, in former time, from the Oracle of Delphos ; because he had heard, that it was my use to undertake everything by their direction. Among other answers, I told him that which had been sent to me, when I had enquired, what course I should take to spend the remaining part of my life as happily as might be :

‘ You shall live happily, Croesus, if you know yourself,’ was the word of the Oracle: ‘ and indeed, Cyrus,’ said I, ‘ I was mightily pleased with this answer; for I thought every one must know himself. But now have I found that nothing is rarer than such knowledge; for, in my ignorance, I thought myself able to contend with you, who are descended of the gods; and, from a child, trained up to arms. But now, Cyrus, I know myself aright. Do you think, then, that Apollo will be as good as his word to me now; since he told me I should be happy, if I knew myself? I ask this of you, because you seem at this time to be able to make me so.’

“ ‘ I know not how that can be,’ replied Cyrus; ‘ I do permit you to keep your wife, and your daughter, and your friends, and servants; and to use the same table you did formerly: and I acquit you also from all military service.’

“ ‘ Then,’ said I, ‘ if you do what you promise, I shall be happy; and I think, therefore, that I must offer some more presents to Apollo, as a testimony of my gratitude.’

“ Well pleased did Cyrus confess himself to be at the manner in which I bore the misfortunes that had befallen me; and begged that we might become friends, and live together: and ever since that time have I been his guest, and his loving companion; and, of a verity, have I, as such, been happier than ever I was, when adorned with all the glory, but oppressed with all the cares of a

throne. This, my good Zadok, is one instance of that greatness of soul in Cyrus which, out of enemies, raiseth up to him devoted and faithful friends. But such instances are not rare; and, if thou wouldst question those who now sit with us, thou mightest hear of more."

"No man, here or elsewhere," warmly exclaimed prince Tigranes, "hath better cause to proclaim the heroic virtues of our great Cyrus, than have I, and all my family. For, when my father, seeing what he thought good occasion for freeing himself and country from tribute and service, due, according to old treaty, by Armenia to the Medes, fell away from his allegiance; and when, after this rebellion had been wholly crushed by Cyrus; and the king my father, and all his treasures, together with the queen, the princesses my sisters, my brother, and my own beautiful and beloved wife, had all fallen into the conqueror's hands,—how, thinkest thou, Zadok,—if indeed the fame of this thing hath not already reached thee, even in Jerusalem,—how, thinkest thou, did Cyrus punish us?"

"The tale," replied Zadok, "hath not met mine ear; and I listen to thee with delight."

"According to the usage of common conquerors," proceeded Tigranes, "my father, and my brother, would have been put to death: my mother, my sisters, my adored wife, would have been made concubines: and the treasures of the kingdom would have been carried away: our cities would have

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been plundered, and destroyed : our helpless people would have been slaughtered, or driven to the desert, or the mountains. Such would have been our fate, had a Belshazzar been the vanquisher. Learn now how we were dealt with by the noble Cyrus.

"Fearful indeed was the sight to me when, arriving hastily, after long absence from home, I beheld my royal father, standing as a prisoner before Cyrus ; and undergoing questions, the answers to which all seemed like sentences pronounced by his own lips against himself. The queen, the princesses, my brother, my wife, the ladies and chief officers of the court, all were present ; for all were captives ; and in the open field it was that this awful trial took place : and great was the consternation among all of us, for, though the words and the tones of Cyrus were calm, yet was his noble countenance grave as that of the judge who prepareth to give sentence.\*

" ' Is it not true,' said Cyrus to my father, ' that you made war upon Astyages, my grandfather ; that you were defeated : that you concluded a treaty, whereby you bound yourself to pay a certain tribute ; to furnish to him a certain number of troops ; and not to keep any fortified place in your country ? ' "

\* This trial scene is taken, in the greater part, from Rollin's Ancient History, in which the somewhat long narrative of Xenophon is well abbreviated.

“ ‘ All these things are the truth,’ replied my father.

“ ‘ Wherefore, then,’ resumed Cyrus, ‘ have you in every article violated that treaty ?’

“ ‘ Because,’ returned my father, ‘ I thought it glorious to strive for freedom.’

“ ‘ But,’ demanded Cyrus, ‘ if any one whom you had reduced to servitude, should attempt to run away from you, how would you deal with him ?’

“ ‘ Surely I should punish him,’ said my father.

“ ‘ And, if you had bestowed a government upon any one of your subjects ; and he should wrongly behave therein, would you permit him to remain in authority ?’ demanded Cyrus.

“ ‘ Of a surety, no,’ returned my father : ‘ I would set another in his place.’

“ ‘ And what,’ resumed Cyrus, ‘ what if he had, in his government, gathered up great riches ?’

“ ‘ I would take them from him,’ was the reply.

“ ‘ But, worst of all,’ proceeded Cyrus, with a darkening look, ‘ if he had entered into league with your enemies, how then would you deal with him ?’

“ At this dread question, my father grew pale ; and, for a while, was silent. Arming his soul to the task, he exclaimed at length, ‘ thou hast admonished me, Cyrus, to speak the truth ; and, though I thereby pronounce my own doom, I will avow it : such man would I surely put to death !’

“ Oh Zadok ! those words drove me well nigh

to madness. I tore the tiara from my head, and rent my garments. The queen, my sisters, my wife, all the ladies of the court, burst out into cries and lamentations: for what else could we expect, than that the conqueror should accept these words as the sentence of the king upon himself! I could no longer keep silence, but sprang before the prince, and conjured him to be merciful. Softened was the countenance of Cyrus as he looked upon me; for well had we been known unto each other, and had often gone forth together in the chase.

“ ‘Oh Cyrus,’ I said, ‘will it be wise in thee, even against thy own advantage, to put to death the beloved father of thy friend?’ ”

“ ‘Against *my* advantage?’ demanded he; ‘how so, Tigranes?’ ”

“ ‘Because,’ said I, ‘if my father continueth to live, he may render thee greater services than ever. He knoweth that he hath committed faults; he hath suffered from them; and suffering hath taught him wisdom.’ ”

“ ‘But as yet,’ said Cyrus, ‘thy father hath suffered nought.’ ”

“ ‘Nay, Cyrus, nay,’ I cried; ‘the dread of punishment is itself a great punishment. He seeth now the way in which he ought to have gone; and in all time to come will he keep his way aright. Besides, Cyrus, what motive to faithfulness is so strong as gratitude? Shouldst thou forgive; and restore to him his throne, his riches,



liberty, wife, and children, what power under heaven could so bind him everlastingly to thy service, as gratitude for such generosity !'

" 'Well then,' said Cyrus, addressing my father, —his voice like music, and his face beaming benignly, as though an inward light were coming from it,—'if I should yield, king of Armenia, to the desire of thy son, so far at least as to spare to thee thy life, and throne,—with how many men, and with how much treasure, wilt thou aid me in the war against the Babylonians?'

" 'With all that I possess,' exclaimed my father. 'My army, my wealth, are, from this day, not mine, but thine alone. My horse and foot number forty and eight thousand : in my treasury are, of gold, about three thousand talents. All are thine.'

" 'I accept,' said Cyrus, 'one-half of thy soldiers ; the rest I leave for the defence of thy country. The annual tribute of fifty talents, due by the treaty, I raise to one hundred. One hundred talents I ask from thee as a loan ; and for that will be myself accountable. But there is yet more to be settled betwixt us. What wouldst thou give me for the ransom of thy wives?'

" 'All that I have,' replied my father.

" 'And for the ransom of thy children?'

" 'All that, by thy generosity, might be left to me,' was the answer.

" 'Then, from this time, king of Armenia,' rejoined Cyrus, 'thy debt to me is twice the value

of all thou hast. And thou, Tigranes,' he pursued, looking at me, 'at what price wouldst thou ransom thy wife?'

" 'Oh Cyrus,' exclaimed I, 'at the price of a thousand lives, if I were gifted with them!'

" 'Very well then,' said Cyrus, looking benignantly around upon us,—'these matters being settled, I pray you all to come in with me to supper.'

" Saying this, he took my father by the hand, and walked towards his tent. Oh Zadok! what a moment was that! My mother, my sisters, my wife, all the women who were present, burst into tears and sobs of joy: and, honestly I confess to thee, that no eyes wept faster than my own. Happily indeed did we pass the hour of supper: and when it was over, Cyrus embraced us all with the affection of a friend. I need not say to thee, Zadok, that, as we returned home in our chariots, nought was spoken of, during the whole way, but Cyrus: some admiring his wisdom; some extolling his valor; some praising the extreme nobleness and beauty of his face and person; and some lauding him for the sweetness of his disposition. And now, Zadok, I will tell thee the words spoken by my beloved wife; for they are stamped upon my soul, even as the letters are stamped, for ever, upon the furnace bricks of Babylon. 'And thou, most lovely,' said I to my wife, who sat beside me in the chariot, 'what didst *thou* think of the noble mien and aspect of Cyrus?'

“ ‘Truly, Tigranes,’ said she, ‘I did not mark him.’ ‘Not mark him?’ I exclaimed; ‘on what, then, my beloved, were thine eyes fixed?’ She burst into tears, threw her arms round my neck, and whispered; ‘on him who said that he would give a thousand lives for my ransom.’ ”

The tears came into the eyes of the young prince as he related these words; and every face present shewed token of sympathy with him. A short silence followed. Zadok, at length, broke it, and said; “And how then, prince, did Cyrus comport himself afterwards towards thy father?”

“On the following day,” Tigranes resumed, “the king my father, filled with admiration and love of Cyrus, sent to him rich presents; and ample refreshments for his whole army; and himself took to him twice the sum of money that he had been required to furnish. Cyrus, however, would take no jot above the sum agreed upon; and restored to my father the rest. He begged, indeed, that the soldiers which had been promised to him, should be ready in three days; and he appointed me to the chief command of them. Nineteen years have gone by: and with him, Zadok, have I ever since been: and sad indeed will be to me the day that parts me from him; for surely such a man as Cyrus may not be found in the whole world beside; so great a general; so wise and noble a philosopher; so kind and true a friend!”

"And thy fond wife, prince," said Zadok, "how hath she fared the while?"

"She is well, and happy; and hath accompanied me, with our children, whithersoever I have gone."

"Thou hast yet many such things to hear of Cyrus," said the venerable Gobryas, who, till now, had not spoken; "and might sit listening here till the sun should arise, before all could be told. I have not, indeed, aught to tell thee of myself, so touching as that which hath just been spoken by the prince of Armenia: neither hath my friend Gadates, here: nevertheless, have we both such things to narrate of the dealings of Cyrus with us, as would, of themselves alone, give great glory to the name of any other man. For this present, however, we must refrain, and give you the good-night; since our duties call us hence. The gods be with you all!"

"And with you," said the rest, as they all rose together. A friendly embrace was exchanged; and then Gobryas and Gadates left the tent.

"It rejoiceth me indeed," exclaimed Zadok, so soon as they had resumed their seats, "to hear all these things of Cyrus; for, truly, the man chosen by God, as he is, ought to be, among other men, as a pearl among pebbles."

"What meanest thou, good Zadok," enquired Croesus, "in saying, as more than once thou hast, that our Cyrus is chosen by God?"

Zadok stood up; and his voice, his look, his

attitude, spake the fervor of his soul, as he replied.

"I said, king Croesus, that he is the chosen of God, because the prophets of Israel's God long ages since predicted, that by Cyrus should Babylon be overthrown; and the people of Israel be released from their captivity. Ay, king, even by name was he foretold."

"A remarkable prediction, indeed," observed Croesus, "if in very truth it was, as thou sayest, spoken ages back. Hath Cyrus himself heard it?"

"I know not," replied Zadok, "if before this night he hath ought heard thereof; but, whether he hear it or not, of a surety shall he do that which is written of him. And that the writing is not of yesterday, nor of any day since Cyrus drew first the breath of life, thine own eyes would make manifest to thee, couldst thou look upon the book in which the prophecy is written. And haply, some day, may both thyself and Cyrus therein behold it; for, though few, few indeed there be of them, yet hath the mother of Michael a book which containeth some portion of our inspired writings; and, among them, is that very prophecy of which I but now spake to thee."

He sat down as he said this; and, for a short time, all remained silent. Croesus, at length, began thus.

"I knew not, good Zadok, that ye also had your Oracles, even as the Greeks: but good

cause have I to advise thee, and all men, not overmuch to trust in the predictions of such ; since, though the word may afterwards be cunningly interpreted to have foretold it, yet is the event, too often, not that which its plain meaning taught to look for. Much have I myself striven to gain knowledge of the things to come ; but never hath the thing foretold, come in the shape that the prophecy had figured it, through the word, or the image of the Oracle."

"Our prophecies," said Zadok, "are not the delusions of Oracles, but the words of truth, inspired by God."

"So aver they of Delphos," replied Cræsus. "I will narrate to thee briefly, in what manner I was answered, when twice, giving fitting presents, I consulted the Delphic Oracle, concerning the events of that very war against Persia, of which I have already spoken ; that war in which I lost my kingdom ; and, but for the magnanimity of Cyrus, might have lost all. The reply to my first enquiry was this. 'Thou mayst know thyself to be in peril, Cræsus, when the Medes shall have a mule to reign over them.'

"Now, Zadok, what thinkest thou of phrase like this? How *could* the Medes have a *mule* for their king? And, if danger were not to approach me, till the coming of an event that seemed an impossible absurdity, what had I to dread? Nevertheless, unsatisfied with an answer so obscure, I sent again ; and with presents more

numerous and costly than before: and this was the answer returned to me. 'Crœsus, when thou shalt pass over the river Halys, to make war against the Medes, thou shalt destroy a mighty empire.'

"Again I ask thee, Zadok, how should I have understood these words, save as a prophecy that, when I should cross that river, to do battle with the Medes, I should destroy the great Median empire? So, at least, read I, and all my counsellors, those words. And, by my faith, both prophecies were fulfilled! but how? What, thinkest thou, was the *mule*, whose rule over the Medes was to omen danger to me? As I live, Zadok, that mule was Cyrus! But how a mule? thou wilt marvel. Even thus; he is the son of a Persian man, and a Median woman: of Cambyses, king of Persia, and of Mandana, daughter of Astyages, king of Media! Such is the interpretation of the word *mule*, according to the language of an Oracle: but, surely, not such is the meaning thereof among men; and, therefore, to me was it a concealed falsehood! And, next, for the second answer. What great empire was it, thinkest thou, that I was doomed to destroy, should I cross the Halys, and make war upon the Medes? Alas! Zadok, that empire was my own! Such then, like deep pits covered with flowers, are often the enticing prophecies which lead men to put trust in them, even to the moment when the fair false ground sinks beneath them, and gives them up

to destruction! Trust not, therefore, overmuch, good Zadok, in words that may be at once true, and false; true to the eye, false to the touch."

"Wert thou not yet, O king," returned Zadok, with a calm majesty of look and tone, "wert thou not yet in Pagan darkness wandering, thou wouldst know, that the word of Israel's God, as spoken by his prophets, is not as that of the vain juggleries of witchcraft, and the false-truth-speaking of human oracles."

"My good friend," said Cræsus, smiling; "I will not say that my gods are the only true gods; and that thine is a false god, and his prophets vain jugglers: but I will ask thee this,—if thirty men, of different religions, sat here with us now; how many of those religions would be the true?"

"Of a surety, one only," exclaimed Zadok, with warmth.

"Then," replied Cræsus, "that being allowed, —tell me, my friend, by what touchstone might the pure gold of that one, be distinguished from the brass of the remaining twenty and nine?"

"By the touchstone of the understanding, seeking diligently for the truth; by the evidences of sacred writ; and by the power of God upon the heart," said Zadok, slowly and solemnly.

"All these things, or somewhat of like kind, my good friend," replied Cræsus, might equally, I think, be said by each man of the twenty and nine, in vindication of his own creed; and thus there would for ever be nine and twenty opinions,



against that *one* whose supporter was even the most absolutely confident of its truth. Let us, therefore, converse no more on a matter which the talk of many months might not help us to settle. Ye have a prophecy, touching the overthrow of yonder mighty Babylon, by Cyrus. Let that be the touchstone of the truth of your religion; of the reality, and the power, and the wisdom of your god. When Babylon shall, as your prophets have predicted, fall before Cyrus, then will I confess, and fall down before your god of Israel."

Zadok started from his chair, and seized the hand of the king; "I accept the test, oh Cræsus," he cried. "As a pyramid on a rock, stand I fixed for everlasting on the truth of the word of our God, and of his prophets. Babylon *will* fall before Cyrus: it *must* fall, even though all the strength of all the East should to-morrow be added to her might: though her gates of brass should be trebled in strength by gates of iron; though her walls should be changed to adamant, and be lifted up, till they overtop the clouds. God hath spoken it; and Babylon must fall!"

Warmly did Cræsus shake the hand of the enthusiastic old man; and, smiling, rejoined; "thy god, and all other gods grant it may thus be: meantime, my friend, I would gladly pledge thee in another cup of that rare wine. Babylon may fall, or it may not: that is a thing pertaining to the Future, and to the Uncertain,—but this

delicious drink is a thing of the Present and the Absolute ; and he is not a wise man, who neglecteth a real and existing good, while musing upon one that is but possible, and future. I drink to thy health, then ; and to thine, Tigranes ; and to the speedy entrance of Cyrus through yonder brazen gates,—whether they be opened unto him, or his battering rams burst them asunder."

In friendly discourse like this passed they the time.

## CHAPTER III.

WHEN Michael, on retiring from the supper-table, entered the private tent of Cyrus, he perceived that the prince was diligently occupied with that task, the necessary execution of which, he had mentioned, as the apology for quitting his guests.

Gently had Michael lifted the curtain; with soft tread had he entered: but every sense, as well as every intellectual power of Cyrus, was at all times so readily aroused to action, that instantaneously was the presence of his guest felt. Starting up, the prince took him by the hand. "Welcome, my Michael, welcome," he said. "But be patient a while: sit thee down; and in brief time I shall be ready to discourse with thee."

Michael seated himself on a rich couch, to which Cyrus had pointed; and the prince returned to his chair; and resumed his task.

On a small table of ebony, richly inlaid with gold, was spread an oblong piece of white leather; upon which,—with a pen, prepared from one of the reeds that grew on the banks of the Euphrates, and the Tigris; and which, occasionally, he dipped into a small vessel of agate, filled with a dark

fluid,—he wrote in a cursive character, and with an evidently practised, though not very rapid hand.

But a short time had elapsed, when he took up the epistle from the table; slowly perused the contents; and then began to roll it up.

“I am confounded,” he said, as he proceeded to enclose the letter in a curiously embroidered silk bag: “Wilt thou believe that, while one portion of my mind hath been engaged with the matter of this letter; and while my spirit hath seemed to be beyond the farther wall of Babylon,—another portion hath been busy with thee,—thy sudden coming hither; and the great good thou mayst render to me. Of all these things have I thought together, as though mind wrought two-handed; or two souls existed at once within me; and each were performing its separate action, in the same moment of time. Expound to me fully how this can have been; and thou wilt do a feat greater than the slaying of a giant.”

He applied blazing wax to the folded end of the silken bag, as he thus spake; impressed a seal, from his finger, upon it: clapped then his hands; and, on the entrance of a soldier, put the missive into his hand. “To Chrysantas,” he said: “bid him speed it ere sunrise.”

The soldier bowed, and withdrew: and Cyrus then, placing his high chair close before the couch on which Michael was seated, laid his hands on both shoulders of the young Israelite; slightly

shook him, and said, playfully; "*I must have thee, Samson. I have a task that must be done; and that no man of the half million whom I command here, can so well execute as thou. I will have no 'NAY' from thee, till thou hast heard the thing that is to be done; and the great end thereof; the good to thine own people, not less than to us; and the glory which shall gather around thyself.*"

"For glory," replied Michael, "if it be that glory which battle may give, I crave it not. To the eyes of other men, such renown may appear as a splendour round the head of the hero: to me it seemeth as a cloud, and a darkness around the soul. I have done with strife of man against man; my last sword-stroke hath been stricken."

"So, thou wouldst cease to *be* a man," returned Cyrus: "for the impulse to resist wrong, is God's gift, as much as the pity which prompts us to aid the wretched. To resist the wrong, is to uphold the right: to submit slavishly to the wrong, is to attack and destroy the right; to overthrow justice; to extirpate all mercy, all kindness, all virtue; and train man to become, at last, a beast more ferocious, more hateful, more selfish, more destructive, more utterly abominable, than the fiercest monster of the desert; the most cunning and deadly serpent. Thou wilt see clearer, wilt feel more rationally anon: but, before touching on that great matter, I have, first, somewhat to learn from thee, regarding thyself; and the cause of thy journey to Jerusalem."

"I have little to tell thee, Cyrus," replied Michael, calmly. "One of the tyrannical nobles of Babylon, desiring money to uphold him in his debaucheries, seized the person of my aged father: put him in chains, and in a dungeon; and then sent to demand from us, for his ransom, a price that we could not, without total ruin, get together: and which my father absolutely forbade us to pay. Knowing that his brother Zadok, of Jerusalem, was held to be a man of much substance; and also pious, and just, and charitable, he counselled that we should seek to him for such aid as he might be inclined to render unto us: and to Jerusalem, accordingly, I went: found the noble Zadok; met from him all possible kindness; and now am returning with him to Babylon; where, after having released his brother, he hopes to pass with us the few years of life that may remain to him. This, Cyrus, is all that I have to tell thee."

"I heartily wish," said Cyrus, laughing, "that all my commanders, from the General to the Decurion, would as closely pack the matter they report, as thou hast done in this, Michael. For thy skill in story-telling, I give thee praise: but thou hast done things that are displeasing to me; and for which, at another time, I might seriously censure thee. Considering the debt due by me to thee, it was not kind, or even just in thee, to visit Jerusalem for the obtainment of that aid, which my heart would have leaped to proffer thee: and to journey thither alone, on so perilous a way,

without thine armour, without stopping even to ask me if, perchance, soldiers of mine might be thitherward tending,—these things, I tell thee, Michael, are unworthy of thee, not less than of me: and I could soon, I feel, wax angry against thee. But come now; speak but the one word; and I will forget, or pardon thy offences. The ransom for thy father,—what the sum?”

Michael remained silent. Cyrus also spake not for a time; but fixed his eyes upon the young man, with an expression so intense, that, though Michael saw them not, he felt their power, like a voiceless command from soul to soul; compelling him to speak.

“Ask me not, Cyrus, I pray thee,” he said at length.

“Yet I do ask; and thou must answer,” was the reply; while the eyes, still fixed,—unseen, indeed, by Michael, as the air, yet felt, as the strong wind,—appeared to him, with each passing moment, to be bowing him down, more and more, towards a final submission.

“I know thy motive, Cyrus,” he said, at last; “and, as I did not at the first ask thy aid, I cannot, without feeling a shame, accept of it now.”

“Then, my good Michael,” replied Cyrus, laughing: “feel as much shame as thou thinkest commendable; but that ransom, spite of all the resistance thou canst make, *must* be paid by me, as thy debtor in ten thousand times a greater sum. In one word, then, declare its amount; for

our time hath more important uses, than for such foolish dispute."

Another brief silence, and then Cyrus proceeded thus. "There *is* a way, friend Michael, by which, if thou approve it, that ransom may be paid, or set aside, without loss of one coin, from either thy purse or mine."

Michael now turned his eyes readily on those of the speaker; and, with some expression of curiosity, in both look and tone, said; "If that way be not a way of wickedness, or bloodshedding, truly much pleasanter would it be, than either of those which at present lie before me. What *is* the way thou speakest of?"

"A way of neither bloodshedding, nor wickedness of any other sort;" answered Cyrus. "All that I would require of thee, would be, that, during a few days, thou shouldst keep that ransom, and thyself, within my camp. At the end of that brief period, thy father would, I believe, be freed, without ransom. That is all that I *require*; what I would *ask*, what I *do* ask, is, that thou, Michael, wilt give the aid of thy sword, and the fullest strength of thine arm, and the warmest fervour of thy spirit, to a deed which a few hours may accomplish: but which, during all time to come, and among the people of all lands, will be renowned."

"As I have before told thee, Cyrus, I care not for renown; nay loathe it, when given for slaughter," said Michael.



“And, as I have before told *thee*,” replied Cyrus, with a seriousness almost severe, “the man who withholds his sword from the *good* cause, *gives* it to the bad one. The oppressor that ought to be smitten down by thee, smites down the innocent, who would, else, have escaped evil. *Thy* deed, then, is it, that bringeth that evil upon those innocent; as much as though thine own hand had smitten them. Didst thou behold a deadly snake stealing towards a sleeping infant; and didst thou, from a loathing to shed blood, refuse to strike the reptile, surely the death of that infant would lie upon thee, as much as though thou hadst with thine own hand slain it. Belshazzar is that reptile: and thy people of Israel, before his deadly power, are feeble as the infant under the fang of the snake. Michael,” he pursued, in a low voice,—low as the sound of a tempest far off, but breathing of an energy as strong,—“I tell thee, Michael, that by the fourth day shall Babylon have fallen. I tell thee not how: I have told it unto no man; not even to the most trusted commander in my armies: but I tell thee again, Michael—in four days shall my armies hold unmolested sway within the walls of Babylon. All is prepared; yet no man knoweth for what. Every sword is lifted for a blow; yet not a man of the half million, seeth where he shall strike. Thy people shall be tenderly dealt with, Michael; were it but for the love I bear unto thee: and surely, if they desire it, will I set them free from

their long captivity ; because they have been the oppressed ; and justice demandeth their release. But, have I not, then, a claim upon every one of them, that he should aid in the *work* that is to be done, as well as share in the *good* that is to be won ? And, of all men, upon thee, Michael, have I the greatest claim ; because by thee, more than by any other man, may the greatest good be done : and that, not for our general cause alone, but for the special gain of thine own peculiar people also.

“Thou renderest me no answer,”—he continued, after a short pause ;—“but, though I should succeed without thee, yet, for the sake of saving greater bloodshed, I demand, for one critical blow, the sword of Samson, and the arm of Michael. Before those will flee at once, the men who will, else, obstinately resist ; and, through that resistance, may perhaps cause to be lost the lives of thousands,—of ourselves, as well as of our enemies,—who would otherwise have lived on. Deny me, then, thy aid, Michael ; and, out of mere tenderness of heart, thou wilt be a murderer ! Ay, of thousands the murderer ! But thou wilt not deny me : thou shalt not ; thou darest not ; for thou wouldst become hateful to thyself, couldst thou sit idly by, while evil men struck with the sword against the good ; while the strong robber plundered, and scourged the feeble wayfarer ; while the debauched lord, Michael, seized upon an aged father ; cast him chained into a dungeon : and demanded from his wife and his children, a ransom

that would beggar them. Against that lord, and his men of violence, thou couldst not, Michael, offer resistance, because thou wouldst have been as one man only, opposed to the tyrant's myriads; and wise was it, therefore, to submit to the wrong: but, when wisdom telleth thee that the time is come to resist; and to strike down the wicked oppressor, who will, else, with more deadly and cruel violence, strike upon the oppressed innocent,—then would it be a wickedness, a cruelty, and a baseness to withhold the blow. And for what? Lest thou shouldst take one life which, *not* taken, will destroy a hundred lives! Thus feeble, thus base, thou, Michael, to whom God hath given strength to do battle for the right; and from whom he expecteth that his gift shall not be neglected,—thus base, I say, thou, Michael, canst never be. Man was made, not to think, and to feel alone; but to act: and, be the deed pleasant, or be it painful,—that which Reason bids, Will should do. I will now say no more to thee. I have dropped into thy mind the seed; and in two days,—mark me,—in two days I look to see it a plant, bearing fruit. On the day that followeth the morrow, then, wilt thou come again unto me; that I may set before thee, in the full sunshine, that which I now may but shew unto thee in shadow?"

"Thou hast, Cyrus, a strange power over my spirit," said Michael, with a tone of sadness. "I like not to refuse thee in aught; because well

I know that, in aught save that which appeareth to thee the right, and the just, and even the merciful, thou wouldst not thus enforce me. But, ere yielding to thee, may I not, at least, ask to know somewhat of the thing desired from me? No idle curiosity have I; and my tongue hath never uttered word, that duty and prudence warned me to leave unspoken. I ask not from thee that which, from all other men, thou dost keep secret; but, solely, the nature of that one act, which my own self am desired to perform. Canst thou so far give to me word of satisfaction?"

"Thou art neither a babbler, nor an impertinent," Cyrus replied, "or I would render to thee no word more. Of all that we speak together this night, thou wilt, I know, let not a syllable escape thee; and, therefore, to a certain limit, will I open to thee a design which, till the last hour before it shall become an act, will I conceal from every man. To thee, indeed, such faith have I in thy true soul,—freely would I reveal all: but that which, for wise purpose, I have concealed from even my oldest and most trusted generals, it would be unjust that I should make known unto thee."

Sinking his voice to a yet softer and deeper tone than before, "Thus then," he said, "in cloud-like shape, I figure the service that I would crave thee to perform. I would have thee,—at the hour and place which thou shalt know when next I see thee,—stand, with a sufficient number of the

young men of thy people, to fling open for me a gate. Through that gate will enter instantly a strong force, chosen from the very flower of my Persian warriors,—men with hearts firm as the steel of their own breast-plates. Short will be their march, ere their swords must ring on the helmets of Babylon's choicest soldiers; armed from the crown to the foot, and more numerous far than those who, in the first moment of assault, can be brought against them. Should the enemy, for even a brief time, make resistance, the alarm would fly through the city: force that might long be irresistible by our numbers, would hurry towards the scene of conflict: and a river of blood would flow. We should prevail in the end,—for I will not dream of defeat, as possible,—but thousands on both sides must fall, ere victory could be won. Such will be the contest, if our first blow strike not on the head, and benumb the limbs, of that body on which we begin the assault. That accomplished, however, and resistance abandoned, the sword might at once stop in its work. Our squadrons, unopposed, would pour in at the gate, and fling open other gates; till the full deluge of arms should drown all thought of confronting us; and the city would be yielded, quietly as an undefended village. To obtain, with the first blow, that prompt victory, which would bring, as its almost certain consequence, such complete and bloodless success,—to obtain this great and merciful end, it is,

Michael, that, when the gate hath been thrown open, and the living stream of iron and of brass poureth in, I require of thee to place thyself at its head ; clothed in thy steel panoply, and wielding the sword of thy great ancestor : and, as once before, like a tempest of thunder and fire, to fall upon and scatter those against whom thou shalt be sent. Slay as little as thou wilt, after thy blade hath been once seen to descend, and the enemy hath fallen back : but, at least, if thou strike not, send out thy voice among them, as on the field of Thymbra ; and it will shake their hearts, as the battering ram shaketh a wall."

"Thou wilt need no man to open for thee a gate, Cyrus, when thou goest against Babylon," replied Michael, his eye flashing, and his form expanding : "for God Himself will burst before thee the gates of brass. So hath the prophet spoken ; and so, assuredly, shall it be !"

"For thee, Michael, to put trust in the prophecies of thy people," returned Cyrus, "may be fitting, and pious : but, for me, who am not one of you ; who know not of the prediction, or the prophet ;—for me, on whom resteth the acting of a vast design, to leave unto supernatural aid, that which all experience telleth me can be accomplished by natural means alone ; by the wisdom, and the strength, and the energy, with which, for such purposes, God hath gifted man ;—for me so to resign the actual and the certain material instruments, in reliance upon agencies supernatural ;

and, for aught I know, perhaps but fantastical,—for me so to act,—me, on whose conduct hang the life and death of myriads,—would be the folly of an idiot. In the gods, assuredly, do I trust; on them do I ever call for protection and success, in all my undertakings: but not one jot the more do I leave undone, that which my best thoughts counsel to be the right means for that success. I tell thee again, Michael, that I can succeed without thy aid. If thou wilt not in quietness open for me that gate,—I can, with a battering ram, break asunder its bolts; or with bars of iron wrench its hinges from the wall: but the noise thereof would be heard; the sword and the spear would be ready to resist our entrance,—and blood would flow as a torrent. That blood, Michael, would be on thy head; for, but for thy wicked folly, it would not have been shed! I know, however, that thou wilt do the just thing. Say but that, on the day after the morrow, thou wilt come to me again; and I am sure thy heart will counsel thee aright.”

“If I be living, and if I *can* come to thee, Cyrus, thou shalt behold me here, by the sixth hour,” said Michael; “and, meantime, I will seek unto God, that I may know his will.”

“In appealing to the gods, man cannot do foolishly,” said Cyrus; “but still, let him beware lest, for the voice of a god, he mistake the whisper of his own error, or passions only. But thou hast strength of head, as well as of limb; and art weak

in one spot only, Michael : and even that weakness, is but virtue distracted."

He took the hand of his young friend while thus speaking, and warmly pressed it. "We understand each other thoroughly, now," he proceeded; "and, on this matter, need not speak a word more. As for payment of thy father's ransom, I insist not farther upon it. Let it be even as thou wilt : take only this assurance, that, if thou pay it to the tyrant lord,—on the fifth day hence, shall he return it to thee tenfold ; or take the place which he hath given to his victim. Thou wilt now be glad to bid me the good night, I doubt not, after thy toils of the day ; yet there is still one small matter, on which I would say a few words to thee."

"I shall be more loth to bid thee good night, Cyrus, than pleased to behold my bed : for truly I feel no fatigue from my journey ; and of thy discourse should never weary."

"Then come with me into the moonlight," said Cyrus, starting up, and laying his hand on the broad shoulder of Michael. "We shall there have a sweeter air : and may see heaven's lamps, instead of these. Yet,—knowest thou," he proceeded, while pointing to the splendid lamps of gold,—“knowest thou that these once blazed in the pavilion of that Sardanapalus, through whose folly and wickedness was overthrown that mightiest of cities, Imperial Nineveh, the earthly queen ?”

"No, Cyrus, I knew it not," said Michael ;



now, for the first time, observing the massive, and most regal looking vessels: "how, then, passed they into thy hand?"

"They were among the spoil taken by Arbaces, king of Media, and afterwards monarch of all Assyria. My mother, thou knowest, is daughter of Astyages, late the king of the Medes,—to her were they given by her father: and by her to me. Far richer spoil than these, however, fell to Arbaces on that same night. The imperial crown, so bright with gems, that it looked like solid sunshine, prisoned in bars of gold: the chariot and horses of Sardanapalus, worth a king's ransom; vessels of silver and of gold, innumerable, and beyond all price, fell on that night into the victor's hands: for the time of a great feasting was it: the king, and all his lords, and captains, and his armies, like to the sea-sands for multitude,—all were feasting upon the plain, when the enemy came upon them. With the hour of noon had that banquet begun; and the noon of night found the revellers unsatiated. Yet drunkenness was upon thousands: the king himself was besotted with wine: throughout the whole camp, was perhaps not one man, whose head and arm were not weakened by the grape juice. In that hour, Michael, there fell upon them a living cataract: and, from that dread night, never did the haughty Nineveh again hold up her head: but, as battle followed battle, still lower and lower did she sink; till her wall was cast down by earthquake and

flood ; the Medes poured in their myriads ; with his own hand Sardanapalus fired his palace ; and, with his concubines, perished in the burning ! and the whole city, at length, was swallowed up, as by an ocean of flame ! I have walked, Michael, over the spot where stood the wondrous Nineveh. All is silent now, and desolate ! Amid its ruins, the beasts of prey make their dens. The eagle and the vulture light upon it, as on the lone places of the wilderness. The grass, and the plant, and the wild flower grow upon it, as on a grave ! And a grave it is ! the grave of the giant that once bestrode the earth ! But come : let us scent the perfumed breeze, and look upon the stars, ere retiring to our beds."

He put his arm within that of Michael ; and, drawing aside a curtain, passed into another tent, and thence into the air. The moon had but just risen behind the city ; and tinged the edges of tower, and battlement, the roofs of palaces, and temples, with a beam of gold-tinted silver. The enormous Babel, part in dark shadow, and part in the rich radiance, soared up, like a great pillar of light, joining heaven and earth. All else, as if curtained off for sleep, lay in dark shade. Laden with odours of unnumbered gardens, came from the city the calm night-wind, breathing new soul into bodies exhausted by the fever-heat of day ; and, in the deep silence, floated on the air the soft chorus of a hundred distant nightingales.

They stood, at length, in an open spot, whence, unimpeded by aught, they had full view of the

city; of the deep, wide trench, dug by the besiegers; and of the camp, to either hand.

"Look up to the stars!" said Cyrus; "how calm! how glorious! how eternal! Look now on yonder city. Seemeth it not secure as the heaven; glorious, beauteous, and almost everlasting? Yet a rumour have I heard, that the day will come, when this proud city shall be even as Nineveh,—a place for the bittern, and the wild dog, and the satyr of the desert."

"Thou hast heard aright, Cyrus," said Michael: "such is the doom spoken against the wicked city, by the holy prophets of Israel."

As though he had not heard the words, Cyrus, pointing to the battlement, went on.

"Thou mayst see, Michael, by the fitful glint of the moon on helm and cuirass, that the armed man keepeth watch on the wall, and in the tower, lest our hosts come by night against their gates. Little know they how, and where, ruin shall enter. The city sleepeth, like an infant in the cradle. Terrible will be the wakening. But I fear, my good Michael, that I begin, unconsciously, to think aloud; and I have yet one small matter to say to thee. Knowest thou, perchance, a young lord of Babylon, Araspes, the nephew of our Croesus?"

"Well do I know him," replied Michael, hastily; almost as though the name had startled him.

"Well?" enquired Cyrus, in a tone of surprise. "Doth the young Babylonian lord, then, freely consort with the oppressed Israelite?"

"He *dwell*eth in Babylon," returned Michael, "but is not Babylonian; either by birth, or by choice; for he hateth the lewd debaucheries of the king, and his lords; and condemneth the unjust oppressions upon our people."

"Why, then, abideth he there," demanded Cyrus, "when his wealth sufficeth to remove him whithersoever he would?"

"Five years have passed," returned Michael, "since he set about to put his affairs in order, that he might quit Babylon, and betake him to Sardis; but his eyes fell suddenly upon a Jewish maiden, the grand-daughter of Zedekiah, once king of Jerusalem: and her beauty hath, since that day, been an invisible chain around his soul."

"Wherefore, then, doth he not espouse the damsel?" asked Cyrus; "surely he would not desire a maiden of kingly race to become his concubine?"

"Gladly would he wed her," said Michael: "with tears hath he oft implored her to be his wife: but a pure daughter of Israel cannot espouse a worshipper of Baal."

"She doth not affection him, perchance," said Cyrus; "A strong love, methinks, would not be vanquished by so weak an opponent as a shadowy difference of creed. Baal and Jehovah, are both, as I think, but different names for the same Supreme Power; and the different forms with which they are worshipped, are merely the inventions of man."

"Cyrus," replied Michael solemnly; "thou art, among men, as a sun among stars; but, as a sun hidden behind a cloud. I may not now dispute this deep matter with thee. The great eternal truth is, to thee, now, as a moon darkened. The time may come, when her full face will shine upon thee: and thou wilt then know, that darkness, and light, are something more than mere difference of name. Unto us, who have *seen* the light, it is vain to say that the dark is as the light, and the light as the dark. He who hath walked in the sunshine, can never be persuaded that midnight blackness is but another word for the noon-day's glory."

"Thou speakest well, and warmly, my young friend," said Cyrus, smiling, and laying his hand kindly on the arm of his companion. "Be it granted, then, as a truth not to be questioned, that *we* are all but dead logs, and that *ye* are blazing torches: and now proceed with thy tale. The damsel, thou sayest, will not marry with him: why, then, doth he not bid the gods speed her; and go, as he purposed, to Sardis?"

"Why doth not the traveller in the desert, expiring with thirst, turn aside from the crystal fountain, and drink the sands!" exclaimed Michael.

"What? Samson tying up flowers?" cried Cyrus, with a pleasant laugh. "Verily, my young friend, I do suspect thee of being thyself athirst after that same crystal fountain of the desert. Confess now, is not the maiden beloved of thee also?"

"No, Cyrus; she is lovely as an opening rose; and might well find favor in even the dullest eye: but stately and grand as a mountain cedar is her sister: and to her am I bound; not only by a love stronger than death, but by the word of promise also."

"So that the bond by which she holdeth thee, do not drag thee back to her, when thy foot should be swift on the path of glory,—and of duty also, Michael,—of duty; duty to all the good, in general, and to thine own oppressed people in especial;—so that she hold thee not back from this, the path of justice and virtue,—the blessing of all gods be upon you both! I need not now question thee, as to the manner of thy becoming known to Araspes: nor do I seek to learn from thee aught touching his disposition and conduct; since, methinks I have already scanned him aright. What I desire of thee, is, that thou wouldst bear to him a message. But, first, let me briefly expound the matter to which that message will have relation. The just and virtuous Belshazzar, thou must know, Michael, hath desire, and design also, to awaken in the breast of my friend Cræsus, a love of justice and of virtue, equal to that which liveth within himself; and, furthermore, to arouse him to the execution of an act corresponsive thereunto. In plainer terms, he hath, through the mouth of Araspes, striven to seduce Cræsus from his supposed alliance with me. He hath not, however, been content with offering to him high

bribes, and the restoration of his kingdom, provided Crœsus will *openly* withdraw his army from me ; no,—the main condition is this ; that, when the army of Belshazzar shall issue from the gates, and join in battle with mine at the trenches,—that *then*, in the fate-poising moment of conflict, Crœsus should turn with his whole force against his former friends ; and do battle for his former enemies. A very sagacious plan, Michael, it might seem, if not a very honest one : but, in truth, is it just as foolish as it is wicked. The poor bloated tyrant, doubtless, hath not the slightest suspicion, that any virtue in man could resist such bribes as he hath offered ; and would laugh at him who should affirm, that Crœsus would not sell his honor and uprightness, even for a crown : he is ignorant, moreover, that Crœsus hath been long released by me from all military duty ; and holdeth, therefore, no command whatever : so that, from first to last, his thought, and his act, have been shameless and silly. Nevertheless, at once to fool the poor schemer, and to save Araspes from the vengeance sure to be wreaked by that bad man on the bringer of evil tidings, word was sent to him by Crœsus, tending to stir hope that, on fitting occasion, the desire of the king might be gratified : and daily have we looked to receive farther message from him. Perhaps, however, he doubteth the good faith of Crœsus ; and, as I would not that the chance of taking the caittiff in his own trap should be wholly lost,—though I

have little expectation to need such means,— words shall now go to him from Crœsus such as may gently fan the blaze, should it be going out. I would have thee, then, bid Araspes say to Belshazzar,—yet no; not from my mouth should the words proceed. Crœsus himself will the most fitly shape it for thee: to him, therefore, speak thou, when we return.”

A brilliant shooting-star streamed at this moment across the sky; and appeared to fall upon the remoter part of the city.

“What thinkest thou of that?” said the prince, solemnly: “portendeth it aught? Is it but a wandering fire, begot by the torrid sun upon the air, and the water, and the earth? or is it as a letter in the great alphabet of heaven—the first of a word, to be thus written; and, when written, to speak the doom of the gods?”

“I cannot answer thee, Cyrus,” replied Michael, in low, reverential tone. “That this, as all else which we behold, proceedeth from God, who can doubt? Yet, of the meaning thereof, presumptuous it were for ignorant man to boast an understanding. Dare I speak, I might say that, in the falling star, not more than in the rising moon, do I behold a special and supernatural putting forth of the Almighty hand. It is not thus, methinks, that God betokeneth the coming on of the things that He hath decreed. In the days of old, when the Almighty deigned to show to man the events of the years unborn,—it was through the ministry



of His glorious angels, that the words were spoken; or through the mouths of His inspired prophets. Neither by the natural signs in the sky, nor by winds, or thunders; nor, as ye, by the entrails of beasts, do we of Israel seek to know the events of the morrow; for in none of these do we acknowledge the language of God."

"What think ye, then, of all yon host of stars; glorious, numberless, and eternal?" said Cyrus, looking upward, with arms crossed upon his breast,—his attitude, his noble countenance, pale, yet bright in the moonbeam; and the deep tones of his rich voice, all expressive of devotion most profound,—“what think ye of those? Speak *they* the destinies of man, the fate of earth? Tell *they* the will of God, or Gods;—or are they themselves Gods; great arbiters of all below?"

"Our Scriptures teach us," answered Michael firmly, yet respectfully, "that the stars, not less than this earth, and all within it, were created by the one only God, who hath been from all eternity, and to all eternity shall be: and that He set them in the sky, to rule the night, even as He set therein the sun, to rule the day."

"To *rule* the night?" demanded Cyrus. "Well see I how the sun doth rule the day,—for, without sun, there would be *no* day: but how the stars may rule the night, I understand not."

"Give they not light?" returned Michael; "declare they not unto man, as they move, the passing of the hours?"

"The light they send to earth, is small indeed," replied Cyrus; "not for that, can it be fitly said, they rule the night: but the hours they tell to the watcher and the wayfarer; and, thus far, at least, do they rule it. But, as they tell man how the stream of Time floweth, may they not tell him more? Surely, if yonder stars be indeed, as ye say, created by one eternal God, it cannot be as a Time-marker only, that He hath covered the sky with such glory. Would not one single bright star, in its course along heaven, have told of Time's passage, well as it can be told by yonder myriads? And would a wise God create tens of thousands, to do that work, which might as fittingly be done by one? When a single soldier sufficeth for a task, I send not an army to perform it. Surely, then, that vast multitude of glorious stars must exist for other and greater ends, than as heaven's hour-glass for man. See ye not, too, that while the most of them, as they wheel over us, remain for ever in their respective places, fixed as the mountains, others there are, that have motion peculiar to themselves, and follow strange paths through the sky; that go out wholly for a time; or are hidden beneath the earth; and then, after awhile, appear again; and run their course as before? Surely for somewhat more, and greater, than the mere measure of the hours, and the shedding of single drops of light, must these exist! The Chaldean priest teacheth, that these moving stars are the lesser gods, who

mediate betwixt man and the higher deities : the Chaldean astrologer reads, in the aspects and motions of these, more especially, the fate of man, through life. We of Persia behold God in everything. We adore the sun, the moon, the stars, earth, fire, water, and wind. These we adore as lesser gods ; or as the agencies, or the manifestations, of the greatest of all gods ; of whom man never hath known, and never can know aught."

"Not of himself, Cyrus," said Michael earnestly : "not of himself can man know, or conceive, of that one only God, whom thou shadowest as the greatest of all gods ; and whom, though thou knowest not his name, his acts, nor his nature, thou dost in reality worship :—not of himself can man know aught of that one only God ; but, Oh Cyrus ! would that I could lead thee to believe that, not by His glorious angels only, but in His own presence, hath God deigned to hold discourse with man ; and to instruct him of His acts, and His nature ; and of His dealings with His creatures ; and of the way in which they ought to worship Him."

"Thou speakest of things inconceivable, and incredible," said Cyrus, solemnly. "Nevertheless, a time may come, when I may question your wisest men, touching these matters : and never, I trust, shall mine ears be shut against the truth. Let us now stand awhile in silence, amid this deep hush of heaven and earth. The army sleepeth ; sleep is over yon huge city ; the night-

ingale, and the soft voiced dove, alone, are awake. After the noise and fatigue of the day, Michael, oft have I thus stood beneath the serene dome of heaven; and felt as in the actual presence of those gods, or that God, whom eye hath never seen, nor thought conceived."

Long time, still as statues of stone, stood they, gazing on the clear vault of heaven, studded by its countless host of stars. Michael, at length, sank to his knees, fell prostrate, and poured forth his spirit in voiceless prayer to Israel's Lord. Cyrus bent the knee, and bowed the head, and worshipped mutely the Great Unknown God of all gods.

After awhile they arose; and in silence returned to the tent.

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Zadok had been conducted to his bed. Tigranes had departed; and Cræsus sat alone, musing upon days gone by: upon memorable talk with his old friends Solon, and Æsopus; and tasting at times, yet temperately, the delicious wine of Helbon. Cyrus, with a cordial embrace, commended them both to the keeping of the gods, and passed on to the inner tent. With few words, Cræsus imparted to Michael the message for Araspes: and then, after like friendly embrace and blessing, they parted, and each sought his rest.

## CHAPTER IV.

ON the evening of that same day ; and at the hour when Michael first shewed to Zadok, from the cedar-crowned hill, that eye-bewildering prospect of the huge sun-steeped city, and the sky-propping tower of Babel,—within one of the thousand garden-squares of Babylon, beneath the shade of umbrageous trees, and thickly-flowering bushes, slowly, and sadly walked three persons ; the mother, the sister, and the sickly young brother of Michael. The women were attired in dark-colored robes of silk, that descended to the ankle. On their feet were sandals, secured by embroidered straps. Dark hoods, slightly relieved by embroidery, were drawn over their heads, so as to skreen the upper part of the face ; while the lower end hung down on the back. The dress of the youth was a dark-colored tunic, reaching to the knee ; a cap of folded linen, somewhat resembling a turban ; and high shoes of dark green cloth.

The mother, tall and stately once, but feeble now, pallid and wrinkled, both with years and with sorrow, leaned heavily on the arms of her children, as, in silence, unbroken, save by ill-sup-

pressed sighs, they walked slowly to and fro. In vain did the rich perfume of flowers wrap her about, like a second atmosphere; or sweep past, like a breath from heaven itself. For delights of sense she had no perception: grief was, to her, the sole reality of life.

The soft grey eyes of the sickly boy moved listlessly from tree to tree, from bush to bush, from flower to flower; but seemed as though he beheld nothing, or cared for nothing, save that which was seen by the eye of mind only.

The countenance of the sister, however, as, now and then, she put back the hood, that she might look upward, toward the sky, or toward the tall head of tree, from which began to issue the first welcome music of the evening breeze, bespoke a spirit as acutely sensitive, as that of her brother appeared to be torpid. Beautiful she was, but pale as a lily. Her form, of middle height, and finely proportioned, seemed as but an instrument for Soul to play upon. From crown to foot, her body appeared, like a harp in the wind, to vibrate with every breath of emotion. Like the flash of light upon a mirror, was the glance of her large blue eye, when the vivid thought or the sudden emotion arose within her: like the bright quiver of the aspen-leaves, was the tremble of her pale, exquisite lips, as she strove to shape it in arrow-swift words. All over was she language: hand, cheek, brow, foot; the motion of her head, the movement of an arm, even of a finger,—all gave

vivid glimpses of the intense activity of thought, feeling, and vitality within. Like a cloud, whose edges quiver with the lightning that cannot leap forth, her whole face seemed, at times, charged with the soul-fire that could not find vent in speech. Quickly as echo replies to the voice, so instantly awoke, in the depths of her delicate spirit, response to every fine thought, every pure or lofty feeling, that came to her from without. Often did she seem to hear voices when, to others, midnight silence was around; to behold shapes, where, to other eyes, was empty space alone. The distant would, to her, seem nigh; the future would be as the present.

"Was it thus," she would at times say to herself, in the stillness and solitude of night,—“was it thus that our great seers felt their spirits moved, when the visions of prophecy came upon them? Yet what am I, that I should share with them in aught? Nor see I clearly, nor hear I distinctly, as they, the coming on of the events, the voices of the invisible. Yet seemeth it, verily, as though I were, at times, apart from my flesh,—and my spirit heard, and saw, and felt, as mortal organs cannot. But what, then, *is* this? Is it a shadowy touch of the prophet's inspiration? or—is it possession? Is it our God who mercifully and beneficently toucheth my soul with holy fire,—or, is it the working of a demon that hath entered into me, for my delusion, and destruction?”

As thoughts like these shook her, she would

turn on her face, and pour forth prayers of agony to Israel's God, that He would pardon all her sins; enlighten her understanding; give her to know the truth; and, in every thought and deed, instruct her in the right.

Such was the being who now, long and patiently, supported the arm of the grief-stricken Hamutal; widowed, though her beloved husband yet lived.

"Rest here, mother," said she, at length; pointing to a seat beneath the shade of a broad Linden tree. "The shadow is thickest here; and the breeze cometh cooler, and sweet, from the over-arched rose-walks."

"Thickest of all, Miriam," returned the mother, as she feebly sat down,—“thickest of all is the shadow that lieth upon my soul. All hope seemeth gone! Our Michael hath surely perished, or, long since, would he have been here! The robber, or the wild beast, or the whirlwind, hath taken his life; and, with him, hath perished all hope of succour for thy unhappy father.”

"Nay, nay, my beloved mother," said Miriam, in cheering tone; "let not thy heart sink thus within thee. The desert whirlwind is, indeed, terrible; but my brother hath, before now, met it; and knoweth well how to find defence against it. And, for the robber, or the wild beast, I give not to them a thought; for, hath not Michael the sword of Samson, and an arm almost as mighty? So that they wound him not from distance, with arrow or spear, hundreds of the way-side robbers



would he scatter, as the wind scattereth the chaff. Bethink thee, mother; the journey is long: our kinsman Zadok may incline to help us, but may require time to convert his substance into gold; or, for he is aged, he may lack strength to do the work quickly: or, haply, our beloved Michael may even now be on the way, and drawing nigh to us. Take comfort, then, my mother,—and put thy trust in God!”

“In Him alone do I trust,” exclaimed Hamutal, clasping her trembling hands. Then, turning towards heaven her tear-dimmed eyes, her white, and grief-ploughed face, “God of Israel,” she said, in low, agitated tone, “when wilt Thou listen to the cries of thy children; and smite their oppressors; and lead us forth with strong hand from this our bondage! Long, long, O Lord, hath thy scourge been upon us, for our transgressions against Thee: but Thou hast promised that the day of our deliverance *shall* come; and that our enemies shall be broken as a potter’s vessel; and scattered as dust before the wind! How long, O Lord! how long, wilt Thou tarry, ere the day cometh!”

“Mother! mother!” said Miriam, in awe-stricken whisper; “See! see!”

With her hood thrown back; one foot advanced; one arm pointing; her face white as marble; her eyes gleaming; her pale lips quivering, as the harp strings when smitten; “See, see, mother,” she whispered tremblingly; “on the top

of the impious tower standeth an angel of God!—His face is as the lightning!—He looketh abroad over all the city!—In his hand is a sword of living flame!—He waveth it toward the four corners of the earth!—He speaketh,—but I know not the words. He talketh thunder!—See, see! he shooteth down from the tower, and flieth abroad over the city; and, with his burning sword, pointeth down upon it.—Ha! this way he cometh! I see his face darkened in anger now; and his eyes stream fire!—Hear ye not a sound as of a tempest? It is the rushing of his wings!—He flieth upward now, like a cloud of fire, swifter than arrows.—Now he seemeth small as a bright star!—He is gone!—Saw I not the flashing of Heaven's gate, at which he entered,—and a glimpse of the glory within?"

She stood, during a brief time, in silence,—her eyes still directed towards heaven; then covered her face with both quivering hands, and sat down.

"Blessed are thine eyes, if thou hast indeed beheld this vision," said the mother, laying her thin trembling hand upon the head of her daughter. "For me,—though anxiously I looked,—nought saw I, save the last quiver of the setting sun on the gilded statue of Baal. But, let us now retire, my children; for I am weary; and the path will soon be wetted by the dew."

"A little while, dear mother, let me rest," said Miriam: "my limbs will scarce support me now; a little, little while."

The mother tenderly kissed her, and drew the hood over her head. For a short time afterwards they sat in total silence: but Miriam, at length, arose refreshed; aided her mother to rise;—and, arm in arm as before, they returned to their habitation.

In a chamber somewhat small, and scantily furnished; yet shewing less the aspect of poverty, than of self-imposed restriction, or simplicity of taste, they found awaiting them their light supper of cakes, dried fruits, and milk. The handmaiden who had prepared it, sat with them at the table, and joined in the prayers that followed the meal. When she had discharged her duty, and had received, and given, the good wishes for the night, the son arose, and gently drew a bolt of the door through which she had passed.

“Why so in haste, Jubal?” asked the mother.

“Because,” answered the youth, in a whisper, “Miriam seemeth more than is her wont disturbed in spirit this night; and sleep, I have heard her say, is always her best medicine.”

“Thou hast done well, my son,” said the mother: “and the manna which supporteth us in this our wilderness, can never be taken at unfit time.”

She arose, while thus speaking; and, drawing from beneath her garment a small key, applied it to what had the appearance of being solid wall, as much as any other portion of the chamber. It was, however, a massive door; so cunningly concealed, that neither by the eye, nor by the touch,

could it be discovered. It was indeed a real wall, but moveable : being composed, like the others, of solid furnace-baked bricks, secured within a frame of iron ; and hung upon hinges of iron, so strong, and truly wrought, that a child's hand might have opened or closed that door, which, off its hinges, a giant's strength could not have lifted. When the door was closed, the hinges were invisible : even the small key-hole was seen no more. Often had the thick sounding-staff of the searcher for plunder, rung against that spot, when seeking for hidden doors ; but the answer had never told him the truth. From every living soul had Adad and his wife concealed that secret, save from their children alone. What treasure beyond price, then, was hidden within that recess ? Reverentially was it brought forth by the aged woman ; and, with careful hand, laid upon a small table of dark, polished wood, inlaid with opaque blue glass,—a rare and precious commodity. A cloth of purple silk wrapped it round. She seated herself on a high chair before the table : palm to palm, raised her thin hands ; and, turning her pale, sorrow-marked, yet fervor-breathing face towards heaven, with trembling lips, in low, awe-stricken tones, said, " God of Israel ! be Thou with us ! " Slowly then she drew back the silken folds, and revealed a large book, the cover of which gleamed with gold and gems. As though it were almost too sacred for the touch of human hand, tenderly, and reverentially, she turned the leaves of thin white

leather; and, after a pause, during which her children noiselessly sank on their knees, read softly, slowly, and solemnly, thus.

“Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.

Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.

Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.

Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies, and thy loving kindnesses; for they have been ever of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant, and his testimonies.

For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth.

The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.

Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.

Turn thou unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged : O bring thou me out of my distresses.

Look upon mine affliction and my pain ; and forgive all my sins.

Consider mine enemies ; for they are many ; and they hate me with cruel hatred.

O keep my soul, and deliver me : let me not be ashamed ; for I put my trust in thee.

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me ; for I wait on thee.

Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles."

A long silence followed, as though each were, in spirit, offering up prayer. Hamutal then gently closed the book, and laid the silken folds over it : her children rose from their knees. Miriam aided her mother from her chair to a couch ; sat down beside her ; looked lovingly in her face ; took her by the hand, and said,

"Mother,—I feel that the prayer of that last verse will speedily be granted ; our God *will* redeem Israel out of all his troubles : we shall go out of this thick darkness into a blessed sunshine ! The bitter will be made sweet ; the thorns will shoot into roses ; the deep quagmires in which we have been sunk, will become gardens of all sweet things ; our feet, that have been so long fettered, will move as if with wings. We shall go forth again, mother, like birds from the net : we shall behold the city of David : we shall see the holy temple rise again from her ashes, like a beautiful flower springing from the dead black earth. Take

thou comfort, then, my mother. Let thine eye be on the mountain's top, tipped by the sunrise ; and not rest for ever on the dark valley, where the night seemeth eternal."

"I do take comfort, my child," said the mother, yet in a tone of sadness. "I feel, not less surely than thou, that God will redeem Israel out of all his troubles : but, ere that day cometh, my days, and thy father's days, may be numbered. Sickness and weakness must fall swiftly on him now ; in darkness, in chains, and the dungeon's foul breath : and, if succour come not for him soon, his wasted lamp will quite go out ! Where, then, could be found the oil that might replenish mine ? No, Miriam ;—*thou* mayst see, perchance, the redemption of Israel ; but, for thy father and for me, the graves are diggen : and my prayer is only this, that, as, for two score years and ten, we have been joined together in life, so in death also may we be joined together."

"Mother, mother," exclaimed Miriam, in agitated tone,—*"thou sinnest, mother, to speak thus,—as if these men of Belial, who now oppress us, were omnipotent, and our God were nought ! Open again that blessed book, my beloved mother : wash the black dust from the eyes of thy spirit ; and read like one who knoweth that God is alone over all : and that His words are not deceitful sounds for the ear, but Things, real and substantial as the foundations of the earth. Hath He not, by his prophet, declared that Babylon shall fall ; and*

that Israel shall go forth out of his captivity? Hath He not, even by name, appointed Cyrus as his servant in that great work? And is not that very Cyrus, even now, hovering like an eagle over the wicked city, and musing where he shall strike? Why then, dearest mother, shouldst thou be thus down-stricken of spirit?"

"Why, my child," answered Hamutal, "should the plant, on which no rain falleth, no sun shineth, wither, and die! I know that, at the due time, Babylon shall fall, and Israel shall go forth: I know that God's instrument in this work, is Cyrus: but I know not, none can know, the day, or the year of this great act. For ten years, and longer, have cities, weaker far than this, defied besiegers: but, in less than one year; less, perhaps, than one month, if help come not to us, thy father will have passed away!"

"But this will not be so, mother," said Miriam. "I *feel* that the day of rejoicing draweth nigh. The hand of God is, I am sure, put forth to strike speedily. Saw I not his glorious angel, even this day, with countenance of wrath, and burning sword, threatening doom on the impious city? Believe me, dearest mother, my father's heart will be sustained from above. Hope will be given to him: he is in the black winter now; but he will behold the tender buds that promise the return of spring. Would that I could give to him, in his dungeon, the comfort and support of a daughter's love! but, that execrable, lewd tyrant! ha!—how



doth my soul abhor him! My father's curse would fall upon me, if again I strove to soften the iron heart of that beast; or if I even let my foot cross his threshold. But strength from heaven will be given to him, doubt it not, my mother. Soon, soon shall we sing, 'Blessed are the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings.'"

She ceased suddenly; stood up; and remained for some time silent. Her face, which had been flushed with the excitement, at length turned rapidly pale: her lips and nostrils began to quiver; her eyes grew wider; were fixed; and seemed to look at somewhat afar off. Breathless, and motionless as a statue, she stood for a while; then, slowly putting forward her arms, as if preparing for an embrace; every finger trembling with eagerness, "Mother,"—she said, in tone soft as that of one talking in sleep, yet tokening a feeling intense,— "Mother! I feel his presence! He is not far from us! His spirit is round about me, like a sunshine! I breathe it like an air! He is drawing nigh! To-morrow will he stand in the flesh amongst us! He will bring gladness!"

"Of whom speakest thou, my child? and on what dost thou look thus?" asked Hamutal, rising hurriedly.

"Of Michael, my brother!" she went on, in the same low, intense tone; "of Michael;—I see him,—fresh as a young oak after rain:—and the shadow of another, whom I know not, is beside him: a man reverend in years!"

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Hamutal, laying her hand upon the outstretched arm of the rapt girl,—  
"thy mind is over-wrought; and thou seest the things that are not! Get thee to thy bed, my beloved; and may the God of Israel send his angels to watch over thee!"

The sudden touch of that hand startled the visionary from her trance; but threw her into a shuddering which, for a time, caused alarm to both parent and brother. She smiled, however, on them; and, with firm resolve, mastered the convulsion that threatened. Carefully was the treasured volume restored to its place of safety: a fervent prayer was put up; and the unhappy, though most affectionate family, retired to rest.

Miriam accompanied her mother to her chamber; received her blessing; and, in turn, commended her to the protection of God during the night: but, before quitting her presence, took the hand of her parent betwixt her own, and said, impressively; "Mother,—it was not a dream,—not a madness,—not a delusion of demons,—it was a truth, invisible to the eye of flesh,—made visible to the eye of my soul! I know not how: but I feel that it is not of evil. My beloved brother is at hand. To-morrow we shall behold him."

"Our God grant it!" ejaculated the mother.  
"May his blessed angels guard thee, my child! and oh! may they pour comfort and strength, amid his afflictions, into the soul of thy unhappy father!"

One more silent embrace ; and they parted for the night.

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That unhappy father ! Comfort, and strength amid his afflictions, indeed needed he ! On that same evening,—while the sun, like the visible glory of God, was flooding earth and sky with his golden beams,—darkness, and pain, and hunger were in the dungeon of Adad. One thin aperture alone in the massive wall, but high above the floor of clay, let in a scanty breath of air, and a dim light, never tinged by the sun. Fetters were upon his limbs ; and a chain that gave short limit for motion, confined him to the wall. His bed was of straw ; and his pillow,—a luxury,—a bag of ashes !

“ Another day is gone,” said, at length, the wretched captive, looking up to the fast darkening gleam,—“ another day,—and still I linger here ! My son, my son ! where art thou hidden from me ? Hath the robber of the way taken from thee thy gold and thy jewels, that thou comest not to open the prison door, and lead thy father forth ? Or hath the savage beast of the desert made of thee his prey ? Or hath sickness overtaken thee, and consumed thy strength ? Or hath the lightning, or the whirlwind, smitten thee to death ? Oh, God of Israel, have mercy on an old afflicted man ; and send help unto me, ere I perish ! ”

“ Here is some help for thee, old Jew,” said the voice of his jailer, who at that moment entered,—

"and better help, too, than thou wilt ever get from that foolish god of thine, whom thou art for ever calling on. Here,—take thy food; and be thankful to our lord, that he doth not give thee daily stripes, instead of a daily meal of good bread and water. But I would have thee prepare thyself for something worse on the morrow. He speaketh wrathfully of thee this night, I would have thee know; and threateneth. Now, as I do not desire to see an old man like thee scourged again so soon, let me counsel thee, if he cometh hither anon, that thou give him promise of the gold, due to him. 'Tis naught to me, thou knowest: for thy own good it is that I bid thee pay thy debt."

"I owe him nought," said Adad, "more than the traveller oweth to the robber."

"He saith otherwise," replied the jailer: "and, by my troth, he hath stronger arguments than thou. Take thought upon it, old man; and save thy skin from the whip, and thy joints from the pulley."

The door closed as the last word was uttered; and Adad was again alone. An earthen vessel of foul water; a small lump of flavorless bread, was the meal placed before him: the only meal that had been brought, since the same hour of the preceding evening. Yet, even this wretched food he could not receive, without acknowledging the goodness of God, the giver of all things. On the stale bread, the turbid water, he begged a blessing: and, when the almost revolting meal

was done, to God he returned thanks. A slight feeling of comfort to his weak frame, did even this poor sustenance impart: and, for a time, he sat in patient stillness; thinking on his beloved wife; his delicate, almost inspired daughter; his poor, ailing boy; and his heroic Michael.

His meditations were broken, at length, by the violent withdrawing of the bolts; the flinging open of the door; the flare of a torch; and the loud voice of one who seemed at once enraged, and intoxicated. Adad turned an anxious look, and beheld his oppressor, Phraortes,—the tyrant lord who, to supply the waste of his means, made by long debaucheries, had seized the person of the old man, as the best key to those treasures, which men had whispered that he possessed.

“Ha! thou wretched old hider of gold,” exclaimed the brutal robber,—holding the torch so close to the face of the shrinking captive, that it dazzled his weak eyes: “thou didst not look to see thy master here to-night. Is thy back healed yet? and ready for another visit of the sweet ten-voiced songster?—or wilt thou honestly pay thy debt to me; that I may get my house cleansed from the abomination of thy presence; and see thee hunted out with dogs? Wilt thou bring forth the gold, Jew? wilt thou pay me thy debt?”

“I owe thee nothing,” replied Adad. “That, nevertheless, I must pay thy demand, or perish here, well know I. And, to gather the means thereunto, hath not my son gone forth even to

Jerusalem? Till he return, thou canst have from me neither gold nor silver."

"Thou liest, Jew," roared the drunken oppressor; "thou hast gold, and silver, and jewels, enough for ten times the poor ransom that I demand. Bring forth in time! Beware! Thou hast a wife,—old and ugly, but thou lovest her: thou hast a young son, weak and sickly,—but thou carest for him: thou hast a daughter,—beautiful as Astarte,—and wouldst die to save her:—beware, I say: bring forth the gold, or I will have them, all of them; and do with them as my pleasure shall be."

"Oh God of Israel! desert me not!" exclaimed the captive, looking upward, with folded hands, and voice of agony.

"Thou fool!" cried the brutal tyrant, spitting in the venerable uplifted face: "thou fool! what is thy God of Israel? *who* is he? *where* is he? what hath he ever done for thee? Bring out thy gold; and that will better help thee, than thy foolish God."

"Blasphemer!" cried the old man, trembling with horror from head to foot: "hear him, O God! hear him, and smite!"

"Call louder upon him," said the tyrant, striking the captive on the cheek, "call louder; and, if he is not deaf, he will come to thy help, doubtless; and will take off thy chains; and open the doors for thee to go forth. Call louder, I say:" and he again smote the cheek of the venerable man, and plucked him by the beard.

Quivering with emotion, Adad looked for a moment upon his tormentor; then, in silence, sent up earnest prayer for protection, to that God whom he had heard mocked; and from whom, as yet, no vengeance had been sent forth.

"What! praying still to thine idol?" cried Phraortes; "thou worse than dog!" again striking him on the cheek, and tearing his beard. "Leave off thy buffoonery: thy god is a lie; and thou art both liar and cheat, if thou give me not my due. Three days I grant thee, dog! On the third night, if thou give me not the gold, thou shalt be scourged till the skin hang from thy flesh like rags; and till thy throat blister with thy long howling."

"Thou hearest this, O God of Abraham," exclaimed Adad, with hushed voice, and tone of deepest horror; "Thou hearest this, O Thou that didst thunder upon Sion! Thou, Jehovah, who didst bring forth thy chosen people . . ."

"He will never bring *thee* forth, thou wretched old fool!" bellowed Phraortes; striking the feeble old man on the ear, with blow so violent, that he dropped at once to the floor, and lay motionless.

"Get thee up, thou babbler of a false god," he continued, striking him with his foot. Adad partly raised himself; but with difficulty, and in much confusion of mind. Phraortes seized him by the beard; and, loudly laughing, dragged him thus, till the captive once more stood up.

"Thou wilt let me have the gold, father," said

he, in tones of bitter mockery: "thou wilt give me that, and much more; wilt thou not, my dear father: if thou wilt not give me that, thou wilt give me thy dear daughter,—I know thou wilt. But, if thou refuse me, then must I take her,—and *will*, father; and let thy foolish god of Israel stay me, if he can."

Adad made no reply; for his head yet swam from the violence of the blow; and he knew not distinctly what were the words spoken. Phraortes flashed the light of the torch across his face; and saw, by his eyes, that the old man's brain was bewildered. "Three days, old fool," he roared out, close to the captive's face, grinning at him in rage and mockery; "three days I grant thee. See that then thou give me the gold; or, by Nisroch! every moment of the few days of thy life to come, shall fall on thee like a drop of melted iron! Thou wretched old idiot! take heed! take heed!"

He thrust the torch so close to the captive's face, that it singed his beard. With a loud savage laugh, he started back; as though expecting that such insult would provoke a blow, even from one so old and feeble; and, with a reeling step, staggered from the room. The heavy bolts were shot to on the outside; and the fiendish laughter died away, as the drunken tormentor stumbled up the stairs.

Dead silence and solitude were felt as blessings, after the brutal voice and loathsome presence of



that monster. The darkness was total now, save for the glimmer of a few stars, through the narrow slit in the upper part of the wall. Feebly the captive seated himself on a rough block of wood,—his only chair,—and long and earnestly did he gaze upon those few bright specks of light, till they began to appear to him glorious and benignant, as a smile on the face of God. Filled with holy fervor, he sank on his knees; and, in deep low tone, poured forth his soul in prayer. Calmed, and refreshed, he rose, at length, and groped along the few steps towards his wretched bed of straw, his pillow of ashes. After he had composed his strengthless limbs for repose, he turned his dim eyes in search of those few blessed stars; that, with the smile of heaven upon him, he might sink to sleep: but they had passed away; and all was blackness!

Earth and heaven were shut out from him: but the mysterious mind began soon to form its own creations: to bring back Time; to rebuild the ruined fabrics; to give voice to tongues, long before then mingled with the dust; to snatch him from the dark dungeon, and bring him to bright places, far away. Fifty long years back did the magic power suddenly transport him. Jerusalem, in all her glory, stood before him, as, with youth's clear eyes, and buoyant spirit, he had beheld her, from a distant height, shining in the beams of morning! her holy Temple, standing like a pure white cloud of heaven, shaped by angelic hands in form of

earthly architecture, and blazoned by the sun's liquid gold.

But, suddenly, that splendour vanished. Darkness and storm hung over the city. Nebuchadnezzar, and his Babylonian hosts, with their engines of war, thundered at the gates. Anon he beheld the conquerors enter. With the thousands of his hapless people, was he carried away captive.—He looked back, as they went on their way; and beheld the city in flames:—he heard the wailing and the shrieks, as the holy Temple itself, like a hill on fire, streamed up to the crimsoned clouds.—He heard the sobs, and groans, as of broken hearts, when it sank down altogether; and the flames for a moment ceased their fury, as if remorseful for the ruin they had made.—He retrod the painful march of the thousands of fettered Israelites, towards that Babylon in which, during fifty years, they had now been weeping their captivity. Most hapless of all among them, the once great king of Jerusalem, Zedekiah! Manacled, and blinded, and mocked, and poorly mounted upon an ass, went he who had worn a crown, and had commanded armies! Heavily did the poor prisoner sigh, as these sad sights came vividly before him. That sigh broke the charm; and persons, time, and place, vanished.

He thought, then, of his stranger-home in Babylon: of his beloved wife, broken with sorrow: his daughter, so exquisitely delicate, threatened, at last, by the lewd tyrant, unless,—almost beyond

hope now,—his brave, bold, devoted Michael should return from Jerusalem, and redeem him from captivity: or unless,—yet more beyond hope,—the long-predicted doom of Babylon should come upon her; and Cyrus, the heaven-appointed instrument, should enter as a conqueror through her gates; and set free the long-oppressed children of Israel! “My son! my son!” he exclaimed at last aloud, in the agony of his spirit: “where art thou, my Michael? my beloved, my brave, my glorious son? Have pity on me, O my God! Have mercy, have mercy! for my heart is withered within me! with the burthen of my sorrow, with sighing, and with groaning is it withered up! Shew unto me, O my God, a token if my son yet liveth!”

Darkness, thick darkness; and stillness as of the grave, remained around him: but he looked upon the blackness, and listened to the silence. A sound, as of the shadow of a voice, at length floated above him: words were heard, as in his soul;

“LET NOT THY HEART SINK WITHIN THEE; FOR THY SON LIVETH, AND WILL COME!”

The old man trembled, and gasped with awe, and holy joy: blessed God, and slept.

## CHAPTER V.

HAPPIER dream visited the poor prisoner, in the dungeon of the petty tyrant Phraortes, than that which, a few hours earlier on the same day, had brought trembling upon the great master of all the petty oppressors of Babylon,—the iniquitous, God-doomed king, Belshazzar. Not in a noisome, airless vault, did he lay down his bloated body, charged with meats, and with wine; that he might sleep away the heaviness. Panting with the heat of day, and unthinking of the fate that hung over him, had he been borne to the highest platform of those wondrous Hanging Gardens; raised by the hand of man; but stored, from base to lofty summit, with every richest flower, and plant, and slender tree, that Nature herself, in even her most bounteous mood, could have brought together. Hither, from the feverish heat below, had he come, while the sun had yet some hours to run; that, amid the deep shade, and the perfume of rarest flowers, he might catch every wandering breath of higher and cooler air, while he ate and drank his fill; and might delight himself with the music of voice and instrument; and with the graceful dance,

and light discourse of a few chosen concubines. Through the thick shade of trees, and climbing flowers, the sunshine pierced in small points only ; dotting the velvet turf, as with drops of gold ; but shorn of all their fire. In baskets of silver, and of gold, richest fruits were piled ; in cups of gold, and of chrystal, and of glass,—a substance yet more rare and valued,—delicious wines, cooled with snow, brought, at due season, from the tops of the far-off mountains of Armenia, were borne, at times, from couch to couch, by soft-voiced eunuchs.

The king had eaten plenteously ; had drunk of wines, precious almost as gold : he had listened to the tale, and the song, and the string of harp and cittern ; and had smiled applause at the graceful gliding of the dancer : but heaviness of brain, at length, weighed down his eye-lids, and made his ears deaf, and his tongue to pause in mid speech. Making a sign with his hand, to a black eunuch who waited nearest to him, he stretched himself on a large couch of silk, thickly embroidered with threads of gold ; and fell, almost instantly, into a profound sleep.

That simple sign of the hand, needed no interpreter. The eye of every concubine, and of every servitor, had been fixed on each motion of their dread master ; and all knew that no foot must stir, no tongue must whisper, after he should have fallen asleep. On their couches of silk and gold, therefore, the concubines at once laid them gently

down : the eunuchs, at due distance, stood patiently, to wait the time of his awakening.

Longer than was his wont did the monarch sleep : but still there was total silence among them all, lest they should disturb, and incense him. The sun went down ; but yet he slept ; and no one dared to waken him. His breath, at last, became like that of one under a great terror ; his teeth were clenched ; his face was distorted ; his limbs started, and shook. At that sight, his favorite concubine, at length, laid her hand upon him ; and, with a stifled cry, he awoke, and sat up, and looked wildly about.

“ Why did ye let me slumber,” he demanded, with husky voice, “ when the sun hath gone down, and darkness is falling ? I have dreamed : I have had a vision,—horrible ! Fly thou, Asshur, and bid that the chief of the Magi come before me, in the hall of Ashtaroth ; for they shall interpret unto me.”

The eunuch, thus addressed, began instantly, at hurried pace, to descend the steps which led from each platform of the gardens to that beneath it. A sort of palanquin,—consisting of two long poles, richly gilt, and connected in the middle by a strong arch of gilded brass, from which was suspended, by cords of purple silk, a swinging chair, softly cushioned, and loaded with embroidery,—was brought, unbidden. The monarch, still trembling, seated himself therein ; leaned backward, with his feet resting on the well-stuffed

foot-board ; and eight strong men, four behind, and four in front, at once gently lifted the poles, and, with cautious tread, began the descent.

The thousand steps were, at length, safely trodden ; and the king walked in his hall, bright as day with naphtha lamps, of silver, and of gold.

But, strangely was he troubled : and again he sent messengers, urgently commanding the presence of the Magi. The queen-mother, Nitocris, entered, —for his sudden distemperature had been made known to her ;—and, in a whisper, he told to her his dream.

“ I can give thee no clue to the meaning thereof, my son,” she said, when he ceased to speak : “ There be dreams which are but the body’s complainings : and which no more shadow the future, than doth the pain from a hornet’s sting : other dreams, we are told, there be, bidden by the gods to visit men, that they may be warned to shun evils which threaten ; or may be turned back in a course of folly, or of wickedness. Of which kind hath been thy dream, thyself, perhaps, may the best judge.”

Her pale, intellectual, commanding, yet mild, and most regal face, was bent full upon her son, while, in calm, but impressive tone, she uttered these few words. And well did he know her meaning ; for, of his many acts of despotism, and cruelty, had she, from his youth up, often admonished him. A ferocious tyrant to all beside, he was ever, before the majesty of his mother’s

spirit, subdued to a show, at least, of respect, and obedience: unwilling respect, indeed; and obedience that passed away with her presence.

"I can judge nought of it, mother," he replied;—"and these accursed Magi drag the foot, as if they were summoned to their own death. By Baal, they shall be taught to know who it is that . . . ."

"They may be abroad, my son," interrupted Nitocris; "or thy messenger may not have had time to reach them. But, hast thou not thought of that wondrous interpreter of dreams, Daniel; who, when all Chaldea's astrologers and sooth-sayers were in darkness, revealed to Nebuchadnezzar . . . ."

"I will hold no speech with him," exclaimed the king, hastily. "He is a Jew; and would deceitfully interpret in this matter. Ha! here come they; and, as seemeth, in haste. Haply may I now hear somewhat."

"The gods be with thee, my son," said Nitocris, about to depart.

"And with thee, my mother."

He left her, as he uttered these words; and seated himself upon a low throne, blazing with gold and gems. Three of the chief among the Magi came before him; bowed to the floor: then rose, and, with hands crossed over their breasts, stood in silence, awaiting his command. For a moment, the queen mother turned her clear, penetrating eyes upon them; the august beauty of her time-marked face



seemed darkened by doubt and anxiety. She spake not, however; but with slow and dignified step, quitted the hall.

"Get thee hence, Ashkenaz," said the king to the black eunuch, who alone had till then been permitted to remain in his presence. "Look to the doors; and, on pain of death, see thou that no man enter."

With forehead to the floor, the eunuch bowed before the king; then rose, and glided from the hall.

"I have dreamed a dream," said the king to the Magi, when they were alone together; "expound it ye unto me."

"What was the dream, dread lord?" submissively asked the elder of the three: "when we shall hear, haply we may have wisdom to interpret it."

"As I slumbered this day on my couch," proceeded the king, in low tone, and with a troubled aspect, "I beheld a vision,—a fearful thing,—and greatly is my soul perplexed thereby: and this is the dream that I dreamed. Methought that I sat upon a throne, brighter than the sun; placed on the summit of a hill, higher than all the mountains of the earth. Broad was the top thereof; and, in a circle round about me, stood all the kings of the world; and bowed down, and worshipped me. And they sang a song, saying, 'Great is Belshazzar, king of the mighty Babylon! king of kings! Vicegerent of the gods! The riches of the

earth are his! he lifteth up, and striketh down the monarchs thereof;—and no living thing standeth up against him!’

“So sang the kings; and laid their crowns upon the earth; and fell prostrate; and still cried, ‘Great is Belshazzar, king of kings, and lord of lords! Mighty is he as a god; and all the nations tremble before him.’

“But, even while thus they cried, behold! there came up the mountain a great beast,—in form a lion; but larger than Behemoth,—and his face liketh to that of a man! The earth shook to the tread of his feet, as when great rocks fall: the lashings of his tail, were as the sound of waves, breaking on the sea shore! He drew nigh unto me; yet I could not move from my place; for the joints of my loins were as weak grass in the wind. Then saw I that the face was as that of a priest of Jerusalem; one of that race of Israel, which we hold in captivity. A phylactery was on his forehead; and thereon a word written, red as with blood. I knew not the meaning thereof; and yet it brought a trembling upon me. Then the beast opened his mouth, and spake. The mouth was that of a lion; the voice as that of ten lions, roaring for their prey: and, for the noise thereof, I could not understand the words that he spake: but, with the fear of them, I fell down from my throne. And, as I lay upon the earth, lo! he smote with his paw; and the mountain shook, and crumbled; and sank, as into a bottomless pit!

## THE HANDWRITING

As the voice of the beast came down unto me in the depth, like a great thunder overhead ;—and I heard then the words that it spake : and my heart shrank within me, even as a leaf curled up in the fire. And these were the words of the voice. ‘ The sun shall fall from heaven ! the waters of the great deep shall cover it ! and it shall be ashes for evermore ! ’

“ And, after the voice had ceased, methought the sides of the pit fell in, and crushed me ; and all the earth rocked, like the waves of the sea. I struggled to get loose ; and, with the agony, awoke. This was my dream. Interpret it now unto me.”

A brief silence ensued ; and the wise men looked each into the face of the other, and whispered together. At length, taking one step in advance, Hadoram, the chief among them, bowed low before the king ; and stood, as if preparing to speak. The gilded blazonry upon his long black robe, slightly quivered to the bright flame of the lamps, as though the trembling of fear were upon him : his thick, plaited white beard, glistened like silver : his figure was tall, but bent with years ; and his sallow face was wrinkled as a withered leaf. But the harsh lines thereon ; the wide, thin, bloodless lips ; the iron jaw ; the cold angular eye, —the whole language of the face, bespoke cunning, bigotry, and cruelty. He it was, in chief, who, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had refused to worship the golden image, set up in the

plain of Dura, had accused them before Nebuchadnezzar ; and counselled him to cast them into the fiery furnace : he it was who, foremost of all, had hated and traduced Daniel ; because, when all the Chaldean astrologers had failed to read it, he had interpreted to the king his dream ; and shewn to him that he should be driven out from among men, and become as a beast, eating the grass of the field : and, if now he trembled, it was not wholly with fear, lest he should displease the king by the foolishness of his interpreting, but with eagerness of hope that he might glut his vengeance upon Daniel, by bringing destruction upon his people. A brief time only did he stand silent ; then bowed again, and spake.

“ The gods, O king Belshazzar, have sent to thee this dream, that thou mayst know how the wicked do conspire against thee ; and mayst, in good time, lift against them the hand of might ; and cut short their plottings ; and make, of their own devices, a rod to scourge them. Now this is the interpretation of the vision. The throne, O king, whereon thou didst sit in thy dream, is this great city, Babylon ; and the hill, higher than all other hills of the world, on which it stood, is thy mighty Assyrian empire ; supreme above all other empires of the East. The kings that bowed down before thee, are all the lesser kings of the earth ; —not one of whom can stand before thee and say, ‘ I am, as thou art.’ But the beast, O king, with form like unto a lion, and with face like to that of

a man,—even of a priest of Jerusalem.—this beast, O king, shadoweth to thee that hated and impious race of Israel, whom the king Nebuchadnezzar brought hither from Jerusalem: and who, with their children, and their children's children, still are suffered to live, and move in this thy great city; worshipping their false god, and setting at nought the majesty of Beal and others, the true gods. And, as the beast came up the hill, and with his stampings made the ground thereof to shake, so is it shadowed unto thee, that this Jewish people, if thou prevent them not, will gather together, when thou dost least think of it,—and will shake thy throne, as that hill was shaken. And the word written on the phylactery over the brow of the beast, red as if in blood, tokeneth to thee, O king, thy own blood, with which the impious priest of Israel would gladly, if thou stay him not, dip his hands, and anoint therewith his forehead; glorying in having slain the mightiest king of the earth. And, as the beast smote with his paw, and made the mountain to crumble, and to sink as into a bottomless pit,—so is it shewn unto thee, O king, that, if thou suffer the Jewish beast to climb thy hill, and to draw near unto thee, he will, with his cunning devices, bring utter destruction upon thee. And the voice which thou didst hear, was the voice of the god that disposeth of kingdoms: and the words that he spake, were a warning unto thee, that thou let not the beast of Israel climb up the hill of thy majesty, and

advance against thee. The *sun*, O king, is thyself: and *heaven*, is this thy kingdom: the *waters of the great deep*, are the utter destruction; and the *ashes*, are the everlasting ruin. Thus, then, O king, shouldst thou understand the meaning of the voice; 'If thou, Belshazzar, king of Babylon, sufferest this beast of Israel to prevail against thee, behold, even as a sun falling from heaven, shalt thou fall from thy throne and dominion: even as that sun would be quenched beneath the waters of the great deep,—so shall all thy splendour and power be extinguished: and, as that sun, extinct, would remain ashes for evermore, even so for evermore shalt thou lie unhonored in the grave; and all thy glories shall be forgotten among men.' This, O king, is the interpretation of thy dream. Let not the favoring god have spoken to thee in vain."

"By Baal, thou tellest me strange things, priest," exclaimed the king. "For, as wisely, methinks, mightest thou warn me against the dogs of Babylon, as against these despised Israelites. What can I have to fear from such as they? and how can they conspire against the greatest of kings, who have not strength to resist even the weakest of his servants!"

"A viper, my lord the king," replied Hadoram, "may, in bodily strength, be weaker than a lamb; but his sting may bring death to a lion."

"True of the viper, and the lion; but not, as I think, of the Jew, and Belshazzar, the king of

Babylon," returned the monarch. "But how, again I ask thee, can these miserable people of Israel lift themselves against the might of the king? Where is their strength? Have they an arm to strike with? a hand to grasp a sword? or gold to bring against us the spears and arrows of strange nations? Are they not as adders without stings,—as wolves without teeth? In what, then, can they peril me? And what know ye of them, that ye warn me against their devices?"

"The warning, O king," replied Hadoram, "cometh not from our lips, but from the gods who rule the nations. But, knoweth not the king, how these Jews go about, whispering among themselves, that the fall of this great city is at hand?"

"Ha!" exclaimed the tyrant, starting forward on his throne,—“Who sayeth this? how know ye that they dare to imagine such things?"

"It hath been told to us," returned Hadoram, "by those who heard them talk thus together, when they knew not that other ears listened."

"Bring before me the men who heard these things; and the Jews that spake them," cried the king. "I will make quick work among those dogs, if thy words be a truth."

"There may be many, O king," replied the priest, "who have heard those impious slaves thus rejoicing together, because of their expected triumph; but, for the two men who reported thereof unto me, they dwell afar off, nigh to the eastern wall; and the Jews, doubtless, nigh unto

the wall on the west,—so that, ere they could be got together, the night would be far spent. On the morrow, if it so please the king, they may be brought before him.”

“Even so be it, then,” said the king. “But how do these besotted expect that this great Babylon is to fall? Whence is to come the force that shall overthrow it? Look they for their fabled god to come against it, with an army of what the fools call his angels? And can they, in their madness, hope that such poor thing could for a moment stand before the might of Baal!”

“There have been, among these Israelites, O king,” replied Hadoram, “men whom they call prophets; and who have foretold that fall of Babylon, which these wicked and infatuated people now expect to come. The prophecies of those men have been written in books, which the Jews esteem more than gold and precious stones: and which they so hide, that no Babylonian hath ever yet beheld them. But I heard, years since, with my own ears, from the lips of a Jew, expiring by torture, that, in one of their books, written by a prophet who died nearly ten score years back, is a prophecy, that this great city shall be taken; even by that very Cyrus who now hath encamped against it.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the king, starting to his feet; “by Cyrus? And this thou heardest years back, sayest thou?”

“Some thrice five years, my lord the king,”



Babylon," returned the monarch. "But again I ask thee, can these miserable people level off themselves against the might of the king? Where is their strength? Have they an arm strike with? a hand to grasp a sword? or go lying against us the spears and arrows of other nations? Are they not as wolves without sting as wolves without teeth? In what, then, can I peril me? And what know ye of them, that war we against their devices?"

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"Bring before me the men who heard these things; and the Jews that spake them," cried the king. "I will make quick work among dogs, if thy words be a truth."

"There may be many, O king," replied the priest, "who have heard these things thus rejoicing together, because of their triumph; but, for the two of them, I will send thereof unto me, they dwell in the eastern wall."

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"Even so be it, then," said the king. "But how do these besotted expect that this great Babylon is to fall? Whence is to come the new god that shall overthrow it? Look they for their what the fools call his angels? And can they, in their madness, hope that such poor thing could for a moment stand before the might of Basil?"

"They have been, among

"Then have been, among these Israelites, prophesied Hadoram, "men whom they call Babylonia: and who have foretold that fall of Babylon, which these wicked and infatuated people now expect to come. The prophecies of those men have been written in books, which the Jews esteem more than gold and precious stones: and which they so hide, that no Babylonian hath ever yet seen them. But I heard, years since, with my own ears, from the lips of a Jew, expiring by a wound, that in one of their books, written by a prophet nearly ten score years back, is a prophecy, that this great city shall be taken, and by the very Chaldeans, who hath encamped

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replied Hadoram. "The Jew had slain a Babylonian, because he had done violence to his daughter."

"And by *name* was this Cyrus predicted?" eagerly demanded the monarch.

"Even as I said, O king," replied the priest; "by *name* was this Cyrus foretold, as the overthrower of Babylon. So, at least, spake the dying Jew: and triumphantly, though in torment."

"I will see one of those books," said Belshazzar, reseating himself. "The Jew may have lied to thee; or the book may be a lie; a thing of yesterday, fabling itself to be from days of old. But I will see that book. Every house throughout the quarter of the Jews shall be searched on the morrow. The chief men among them shall be cast into prison. Meantime, do thou, Hadoram, get together thy witnesses; and the Jews whom they accused to thee of speaking of the fall of the city: and come thou with them before me, at the sixth hour. Retire ye now, reverend men; and, in the stillness of night, think again of this dream; and if it may be yet farther interpreted."

With hands folded over their breasts, the Magi bowed low before the king, and departed. Belshazzar, sorely troubled, walked for a while, with agitated steps, to and fro in the echoing hall: then summoned the black eunuch; and bade that Sar-sechim, his chief minister, should come before him.

"I know not what to think of this strange dream; and its stranger interpretation," he said

inwardly, as he reseated himself on the throne; his bloated person wearied by the brief exercise; and his large flabby face beaded with the sweat of agitation, and ill-defined terror. "But, true or false, the dream hath led to good. I had, else, known nought of these predictions, and hopes; which, unless checked, may lead the dupes to act. I am now warned to put a curb upon them; and, by my faith, my trouble shall have reward beside, in some fashion. 'Twas but the other day, that Togarmah brought moisture on my lips, by painting to me the beauty of one of the women of these Israelites. By the bright eyes of Astarte, I will have some of the virgin honey out of that hive! . . . But this Cyrus,—foretold, even by name! What may it mean? Psha! Have I not within the city four hundred thousands of valiant soldiers;—provision for a score of years; and walls and gates that would resist the world in arms? What should I fear! Away with such idle dreams and prophecies! I am Belshazzar, king of all the East; and defy both prophet, and foe!"

With meditations like this he remained so wholly absorbed, that he had not noted the entrance of that chief minister, whose presence he had commanded. A figure of middle height, and in the full bloom of manhood, stood, at length, before the king: humbly bowed; then, with hands crossed over the breast, waited the pleasure of his master. His silken tunic, descending to the ankles, gleamed with embroidery in gold: at the waist was a girdle, edged with golden fringe; and a gold-fringed

band, passed over his shoulders. He wore ear-rings of emerald; armlets, bracelets, and a necklace, in which blended the hues of ruby, sapphire, emerald, and diamond. A fillet of gold, spotted with ruby, circled his temples. His dark brown hair was parted over his forehead, and fell in thick ringlets down his back. His massive beard, in three distinct rows of curls, hung down low upon his breast. His sandals gleamed with gilded straps; and on each instep flashed a diamond. Such was the figure, radiant as a human form fashioned out of the rainbow, that now, blazing beneath the sunny light of the lamps, stood in silence, waiting the pleasure of the mind-distracted king.

"Ha!" exclaimed Belshazzar, when his eye first caught the glitter; "I saw thee not. But now, draw nigher to me; for I have a strange thing to say unto thee."

The minister bowed at the word; and, bowing, advanced near to the throne; and, when he stood still, again bowed, lower than before.

"I have had a dream, Sarsechim; a strange and fearful dream; and the chief of the magicians hath but now expounded unto me the meaning thereof. But, of the dream itself, I speak not now unto thee. Tell me, Sarsechim, hast thou heard aught, touching the expectation of these Jews, who are our captives, that some great evil will fall ere long upon this city;—nay, even that Babylon will be overthrown; as predicted by some of their prophets of old?"

"May the king live for ever!" said Sarsechim. "Some report, touching such prophecy, or dream,

did I hear in the days of my youth: but it had passed away from my remembrance, as an idle fable, not worthy of a thought."

"And hast thou nought heard, of late, touching such expectance, newly stirring among the Jews?" asked the king, with a keener look of his large blood-shot eyes, which seemed to say, that such a matter *ought* to have been heard of by the prime minister of his kingdom.

"I bethink me, O king!" said Sarsechim, after a short silence, "that a word was spoken in my hearing, but few days since, concerning a sort of idle rumour among the Jews, that this Persian Cyrus,—whom may the gods confound!—is destined,—in some way or other,—to do some great thing for them. But, what that thing is to be; or how, or when it is to come, no man, I believe, knoweth, more than the stone under the foot."

"Then I can tell thee, Sarsechim," said Belshazzar,—his eyes flaming, and his large loose lips slightly quivering, with an expression that had shot horror into thousands, as the harbinger of torture, or death,—“I can tell thee that which *thou*, of all men, shouldst have been the first to know. These Jews are now in earnest looking out for the speedy fulfilment of a prediction, made, it is said, near ten score of years back, by one of their prophets: and that prediction—that idle rumour, as thou callest it, about which no man either knoweth, or careth aught,—is no less than this,—that, by the very man, Cyrus, who now beleaguereth the city, shall it be overthrown.

This it is, for which the Jews are presently looking: and to this end assuredly will they labor, if we prevent them not. I would have thee, therefore, early in the morning, send out officers, to seize upon the persons of the chief men of the Jews; and to cast them forthwith into prison. Now there is another thing also, that I will to be done, and on the same day; but the task will be harder. It hath been told me, that the prophecies of those Israelitish seers are written in books: but that these books are valued by the Jews, more than gold and gems; and are hidden with such care, that no man of Babylon hath ever been permitted to see them. Now, one of these books must be brought before me; that I may, with my own eyes, judge, whether the book be of yesterday only, or of years long passed; and may read their prophecies, and weigh them; and know whether to value aught in them, or to fling them into the fire. Use what means thou wilt,—promise of reward, or threat of torture, or death, as thou seest good,—but, obtain thou one of those books, ere the sixth hour of the morrow. If one be not found, or brought forth, the house of every Jew in the city shall be searched, till not a fly pass unseen: and a tax shall be laid upon them, that will dry up their blood, by reason of hunger.

“Now there is also another thing that I would have done; and, if thou, Sarsechim, wouldst redeem thy fault in the eyes of the king, see that thou do it diligently, It hath been told me that, among these Jews, there be women, and virgins,

of a great beauty. When thy officers seize the chief men, let their houses be searched; and, if such women be found, let them be brought before me: and, if they find favor in his sight, the king shall do them honor. But, let none be brought, save diamonds of the brightest; for, on other than such, careth he not to look."

"Thy pleasure, O king, shall be done," said the minister. "At the third hour of the day, the Jews gather together in their temples: even at their impious worship, shall their chief men be seized: and among them, haply, may be found one of their accursed books. At the same hour also, shall officers go about to search for the pearls among their women: though even now is it known unto me where to find two, the rarest and the most esteemed among them; and such, methinks, as would find great favor in the sight of the king."

"Bring thou, then, those twain before me, at the fourth hour; and let the rest remain till another day. But, if aught of rare beauty be seen by thy officers, let such be kept in remembrance; that, when he shall desire it, they, also, may be led before the king."

"The king's commands shall in all things be obeyed," replied the minister. "May the king live for ever!"

Again he bent, till his forehead almost touched the floor. When he arose, he saw that the monarch was passing forth.



## CHAPTER VI.

'TIS nigh the hour of midnight; and Belshazzar, with a few of his lords, sits drinking the golden wine, that he may drive away from his spirit the darkness which his strange vision had cast upon him. He sees nought but sunshine now, where had just been thick cloud; and he laughs in derision at prophecy, and at all his enemies; and thinks pleasantly of the bright eyes, and honeyed lips, that, on the next day, shall minister to his delight.

But, at that same solemn hour, on the very summit of the sky-propping Babel, stands, gazing on the stars, a solitary figure. Could any eye, from below, have seen it, haply it might have been thought some high-soaring bird of night, that had alighted there. In the narrow circular gallery, immediately around the base of the statue of Baal, and defended by a low parapet only from the fearful depth beneath, stands that lonely figure, looking in the sky, and vainly striving to read therein the will of the gods. It is the great and good Nitocris, anxious to learn the destiny of Babylon, and of her heaven-doomed son, Bel-

shazzar. Not one cloud floats in the air : of deepest blue is the sacred firmament : from end to end of the vast arch, the stars blaze sun-like : silence, intense as if from eternity it had been unbroken, is in the heaven ; and seems to cover the great city beneath, as a deep still sea might have covered it.

She moves, at length ; with slow step, and with eyes still directed upward, she paces round and round the narrow, brain-dizzying gallery. At times she stops, and looks below, on that which might be a pictured city only ; so without sound, or life, or motion, lies it there ; and then, again, slowly she glides on. At last, on the dead stillness, rises a gentle, melancholy voice.

" 'Tis vain, all vain ! " she exclaims, stopping suddenly, and clasping her hands ; " As the babble of children, is the wisdom of these Chaldean astrologers ! They prate to me of stars conjunct, opposed, friendly, malignant : and they measure out to me a long thread of events that *may* be ; but, spun from their own cunning invention, as seemeth to me, rather than aught learned by their art from the book of futurity. They speak to me the *words* of hope ; they figure mighty things to be done by my son, for his own glory, and for that of Babylon, —but, from their words of hopefulness, nay of promise, cometh to me no *hope*. My soul feeleth in the shadow of a great evil, drawing nigh. This portentous dream, if it meaneth aught ; if it is indeed sent by some power, more than man's,

pointeth to an utter destruction, already bidden to go forth. This Jewish prophecy, too, hangeth over me like a rock, loosened, and about to fall. Some score of years since, did Daniel himself shew it to me, in the treasured volume of the Hebrew Scripture: and that now dreaded name, Cyrus, was, *then*, unknown among men. He is come now; and, as I fear, to fulfil the words of the seer! A strange race, indeed, are these of Israel; calling themselves the chosen people of God; yet, for ever oppressed, and insulted, and enslaved, as though not even the weakest of gods took care for them! But, for the punishment of their sins, saith their wise priest Daniel, hath this, their greatest captivity, fallen upon them: and the end of it shall be, when this Cyrus cometh to open the gates for them, and bid them go forth. Well—he is here! but, *how* shall he open the gates? and, when opened, who shall enter? who shall depart? who shall stand? who shall fall?

“Even thus was prophecy against mighty Nineveh; that most glorious of all the cities of the earth. Like a star from heaven, she fell: and, in her gorgeous palaces, now, are the worm, and the lizard, the wolf, the wild dog, and the satyr of the desert! Shalt thou, too, fall, O Babylon! Shalt thou go out, like a taper, before the blast of angry gods, or god! Shall the owl, and the bittern, make their nests, where once stood the pleasant habitations of thy people! If thus, for what have *I* toiled so long,—strengthening thy river-

banks, thy walls, and gates ; and building up a palace, such as, in the world beside, no equal hath ! Verily is the might of man but as the spider's cunning ! He laboreth to spin his web ; and, when it is done, he glorieth in his work, and thinketh of the prey on which he shall feast. But, behold, a hand unknown cometh ; and it is swept away ! Whose, then, is that unknown hand, that sweepeth away kings, and great cities, and dominions, even as the web of the spider ? Nay, the very stars of heaven, have not *they* been swept from the firmament ! Whose, then, the power unknown, that thus dealeth with all things ?

“ Thou foolish toy ! ” she proceeded, after a while, looking up to the gigantic statue of Baal,—“ canst *thou* image the almighty one that thus ruleth in earth, and in heaven ! But thou art a symbol only, not a similitude. Thou standest there, not as a likeness of the unknown ; but as a word, written with gold, and shaped as a man. Thou art a meaning only ; and that meaning is, the one great god of all gods. Who, then, is he ? where is he ? hath he one sole name ? how shall mortals address him ? how shall they render to him the worship that shall be acceptable unto him ? Are there other gods, as our priests teach, that rule with, though under him ? or, as the Israelite believeth, is there one god only, the creator, the director of all things, both on earth, and in heaven ? One from eternity, and One to remain throughout eternity ? How can man know

this mystery, unless a god reveal it unto him! But, be there many, or be there but one, in the great hands unknown are the lives, and the destinies of man; the fates of kingdoms; of the earth; of the sun; and of all the host of heaven: and to those powers, or to that one power, must the proudest of men humble himself in the dust; for, even the greatest of kings is, to the least of gods, poorer than a worm to the sun! Would I could hear the truth! Our priests confuse me; they talk mysteriously, but coldly, of that which is unknown to them, as the depths of the ocean. They have learned a lesson; and they repeat it, as an echo repeateth that of which it hath no knowledge. I will speak again with that wise man Daniel; and, better than before, will I weigh his words: for something telleth me, that not many will be my days on earth: and in the dead ear, wisdom entereth not! Perchance he may tell me, too, somewhat of thy fate, beloved Babylon,—for my soul trembleth because of thee."

She looked below, as these words were uttered; and started back, as she beheld, half way betwixt herself and the earth, a huge dark thing, floating slowly along the air. Was it a solid cloud only? But the moon shone brightly; and would have coated it with silver! No! It was blacker than ebony; as though heaven's light would not touch it! and its shape,—what was it? To nought of earth could she liken it! nay, with every moment did it change; as though it were but a drapery of

black air, wrapping a thing that lived and moved within it. Seemed, once, as if two blazing eyes, piercing the dark shroud, were turned up towards her: but in a moment they vanished.

"The Spirit of Evil!" she whispered, shuddering; and covered her eyes with both hands.

Recovering, however, from the momentary terror, and speaking with calm, firm voice; "But the Spirit of Good," she said,—“the one god of gods, is mightier than the Spirit of Evil. Dark Power! comest thou to look where best thou mayst hurl down destruction? But a stronger arm than thine may perchance shield us from thy malice.”

She looked again below; but all the air was clear as crystal! The city lay serene and beautiful, as may be the habitations of the good, in some better world; or on the plains that border heaven.

"Thou art gone, then," she pursued, after having walked round the gallery, and looked over all the great sea of architecture beneath,—“thou art gone, dark spirit; and I feel again as in the presence of that Power which is the creator, as thou wouldst be the destroyer, of all things.”

In silence she glided slowly round the narrow circle,—her eyes fixed on the stars,—her thoughts on their maker.

"First of all gods,—or sole God,—whichsoever thou be," she said, sinking on her knees, and lifting her trembling hands,—“may I, unblamed, call upon thee, from the depths of my soul; and pray, that a knowledge of thee, and of thy will,

may be given unto me! And oh! that thou wouldst mercifully stretch forth thine hand, and save from the utmost malice of the Evil One, this guilty, yet beloved city!"

She bowed her head when she had spoken these words; and remained long time in silence; hoping for some sign that her prayer had been heard. The stillness was solid as a rock. She opened her eyes, at length, and stood up.

What was the radiance that she saw, and felt about her? As the small glow-worm, in his little chamber of pale emerald light, so seemed she, as in an odoriferous atmosphere of delicate fire, that burned not. She stood in ecstasy! she looked,—she listened:—she felt a presence—unseen—not of earth! A wafting, as from a wing steeped in the essences of heaven's flowers, fanned her beaming face. A faint sound, like a quick brush of the wind through trees, was heard; and again she felt herself alone! The radiance had departed! all was once more of earth! She drew a deep breath; and waited long, and anxiously; then struck, at length upon a door; and a pale-faced priest, bearing in his hand a bright lamp, answered the summons.

"I will retire," said the queen, mildly; "let my servitors attend me."

By internal stairs, she descended to the platform above the seventh tower: and thence, in like manner as Belshazzar had been borne from the Hanging Gardens, was she carried, by the outer

steps, as through the air, till she reached the ground. Mounting her chariot then, she returned; not to that palace of the king which she herself had built, but to the nigher, and less gorgeous fabric which, seventeen hundred years before, had arisen at the command of that great hunter of men, Nimrod. This, her own more peculiar abode; that she might see not, and hear not, the wickedness, the debauchery, and the noisy riot, in which gloried her degenerate son. Though mourning for the afflictions which she feared were coming upon the king, and upon Babylon, yet was there a calm sunlight suddenly arisen within her soul. She retired to her chamber. Again she prayed,—and, *now*, to the One Only God. Serene was her repose that night!

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Thus ended the Seventeenth Day of the month Sivan.





## CHAPTER VII.

THE eighteenth day of the month has dawned. There is a gentle stir in the city ; and in the camp of Cyrus. While yet the stars were visible, and the westering moon shed brighter light than that of the kindling orient, in the sweet privacy of a garden, fragrant with the odours of dewy morn, walked two damsels of Israel,—Naomi, and Ruth, granddaughters of the wretched king of Jerusalem, Zedekiah.

Five years had now passed, since his painful captivity ended, and he was gathered to his fathers. The blame which had long been cast upon him by the Jews, for his disobedience to the warning of the prophet Jeremiah, and for the evils which he had thereby brought upon Israel, had now, during many years, been heard no more ; so was the memory of his fault, lost in pity for his sufferings : and his daughter Zillah, and her children, were held in highest esteem and affection, by all the remnant of the people.

Arm in arm, the loving sisters walked ; glancing at flowers, and fruits ; inhaling the exquisite perfume, and listening to the first gentle notes of the

sweetening voice. The melody was all these pure feelings personified. *And did not more*: for in the number of birds were thoughts that breathed such words.

All eyes and a dove would not have imagined the difference between these two creatures of Zillah: but if such could have been found, an eagle that did not rend the prey,—a dove that was as useful as a hawk, and musical as a nightingale.

Fit wife for the heroic Michael was Naomi, the elder: tall, pale, majestic: with hair dark as the raven's wing. But her large, black eye, more oft than his, shot forth the spirit's lightning, when emotion, or passion, stirred within her. In repose, her countenance was grave, firm, and dignified,—yet gentle too, as that of some completest statue, fashioned to embody the conception of a more than mortal beauty. Every movement of her noble form, was as a strain of solemn music,—grace, power, and grandeur combined.

Ruth, the younger by one year only, was somewhat above the common height of woman; and could, at times, look with much of the stately grace of her sister: but the prevailing expression of face, form, and motion, was that of a sweet cheerfulness; an acute sensibility to all impressions, whether upon sense, or upon spirit. The love of music was, in her, as a very principle of life. Even in her dreams, was there an out-pouring of sweet sounds from her soul, as from a fountain always full, and overflowing. So melodious was

her voice, that her simplest speech sounded like music: and, even amid grave discourse, would snatch of sweet melody distil unconsciously from her; like the few soft notes breathed forth at intervals, as in his own despite, by the nightingale, when he fears danger to his nest, and will not give forth his song. Beauteous, perhaps, as her sister was she: but that beauty was of different order:—the beauty of a garden filled with sweet flowers, as compared to that of a majestic, cedar-topped hill. Lambently blue were her quick, mild eyes: her hair like a streak of golden cloud. As a rose among thick leaves, was her smile-loving mouth embedded in dimples, ever changing and shifting, as the wind-dots on a clear water; and like the rose-tinge on a white lily, was the bloom on her cheeks. More rapid in her motions, more playful, more gracefully negligent than her sister, was she: but the sad mood was on her now; and, after long silence, heaving a gentle sigh, she said.

“I fear, I fear, Naomi, that our God looketh not with pleased eye on my love for this pagan youth; or surely, ere this, would He have enlightened his understanding; and set before him the glorious truths of our holy religion; so that he could not choose but forsake his old idols, and worship the God of Israel.”

“But he hath *almost* come into the light,” said Naomi; “and, I cannot doubt, *will* come fully into it. All night hath the sun been travelling in darkness: but speedily, now, will he arise in his

splendour. Araspes, thus, hath been long in the night of the heathen; but I have seen on his countenance, methinks, the tints from the great sun of Truth, that will, ere long, rise upon him."

"So have I sometimes thought, sister," returned Ruth; "but that which appeared to be the reflection from a sun about to rise, hath vanished, because there hath been no true sun beneath. The fifth year now hath passed, since I told him, that neither beauty, nor goodness, nor power, nor riches, nor dominion,—would ever persuade a true daughter of Israel, to give her hand in marriage to one of the heathen; and yet, while in vain he imploreth me to become his wife, he doeth not that which alone can give to my tongue the power to say unto him, 'I am thine.'"

"The strong wind bloweth against a tree," said Naomi: "the tree resisteth: it boweth, and riseth again; even, perchance, to the thousandth time: but, at the next blast, it falleth. So shall it be with Araspes: for I have seen him bent almost to the ground before thee; and, though he hath risen again, it hath been laboriously, and like one whose strength is failing him. If our good Daniel would speak unto him, for but one hour, he would, on that very day, kneel in our temple: and on the next day, Ruth, thou wouldst kneel beside him, and speak the words of betrothal."

"Oh! may our God speed that day!" exclaimed Ruth, clasping her hands; "for truly, sister, doth my heart yearn towards him! All virtues, me-

thinks, hath he, that unregenerated man can have : and, would he but enter into the true light, Oh happy, happy should I be, to walk with him the remainder of our days !”

“He *will* come into that light, dearest Ruth,” said Naomi. “But yestereve, I saw that his very soul was sick with love, when thou didst sing to us thy last sweet song. Would that I could thus breathe forth the language that seemeth the speech of heaven’s angels, rather than mortal strains ! for I have seen even the majestic eyes of my Michael swimming in tears, and his firm lips quivering, when thou hast uttered the inspired thoughts of our blessed David, with thy own inspired sounds. Yet, must I be contented with those gifts which our God hath bestowed upon me ; for, verily, I need not desire warmer love, than that with which Michael, I feel, hath blessed me.”

“He doth love thee truly, my sister,” said Ruth, looking fondly in her face : “and strange indeed would it be if, so favored by thee, he could do less. But, Naomi . . . .”

She paused, as if fearful to speak the thought that moved her.

“Well, my sweet Ruth,” said the elder, “why dost thou stop in thy speech ? Say what thou wouldst.”

“I fear to pain thee, my beloved sister,” replied Ruth, looking again in her face, and turning slightly pale : “but,—Michael, methinks, stayeth long away. I feel—sometimes—for he went alone,

—on a long journey;—if it were Araspes who thus . . . .”

“I understand thee, my dearest Ruth,” said Naomi, bending to her sister, and looking into her apprehensive face, with a calm smile: “and I, too, should be fearful for him, were it Araspes who had thus gone alone upon such long and perilous journey. But, for Michael, I have no fear. He is calm, and cautious; strong to endure, and invincible in act. Nor is the time even yet expired, which he warned me that he might consume on his mission. I have no fear for him, my beloved; and doubt not, soon, to see him here. And yet, I would that he were come: for Araspes, thou knowest, whispered to us last night, that Cyrus, of a surety, meditateth somewhat against the city; and that quickly; though in what manner of act, no man knoweth, even in his own camp: and the presence of Michael would be a strong shield to us against the rude soldiery, should they enter the gates. But here we are at our favorite bower. Let us sit down, my Ruth; and, as the sun riseth, sing thou to me again that sweet song of David; for, through the night, as I awaked for brief while, thy voice seemed to be pouring the soft music into my soul, as I had felt it just before going to rest. From this retired spot no ear can catch the sound; or, should it, ’twould but be thought that some delicate angel had lighted in our garden; and was breathing forth his morning hymn to God.”

There was no flutter of pride in Ruth, as in a

vain mind pleased with flattery. She knew her sister's sincere spirit; and that her words spake her feelings. Without affectation, therefore, or denial of desert, she sat down beside Naomi: plucked from a branch a half-blown rose, gleaming with dew; put her arm round the waist of her sister, as that of Naomi had just been twined round her own; and, in tones sweeter and more tender than voice of richest flute, breathed forth that touching psalm,

"Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

For thou art the God of my strength; why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

When the song was done, both sat a while in silence,—their eyes running over with tears; their hearts pouring forth deepest devotion to their Creator. Naomi, at length, tenderly embraced, and kissed her beloved, and so rarely gifted sister.



The fond kiss and embrace were returned : and, then, they arose ; and, in a loving link of arms, slowly retrod the fragrant garden. Softly talking, at times ; pausing, now, to gather some delicious flower ; now, to look up towards some tall tree, whispering with the morning air ; or to gaze at the statue of Baal on the summit of the tower, blazing in the sun-fire which had not yet risen on the city, —sad, yet not unhappy ; and undreaming of the sore affliction which hung over them, thus went they early back ; that, with the simplicity of the Patriarchal days, they might themselves see to the preparation of the morning meal for their beloved parents ; and join in their matin devotions.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“Is she now, as is her wont, breathing the sweet air of morning; and shedding glory, as she walks along, upon every alley, and open place, and tree, and bower, of that delicious garden?”

So said, half aloud, the just-awakened lover of Naomi; what time the sisters had left the porch of their house, to wander among the leaves and flowers. He started from his couch; drew aside the curtain door of the tent, and looked forth. Babel was yet silvered with moonlight; but, far as he might see toward the east, a faint tinge of grey was on the sky; and he knew that the dawn had begun. Putting a light hand on the shoulder of Zadok, who slept at the opposite end of the roomy tent, he awoke him, and whispered that it was time to rise. With a vacant stare, the old man at first looked up, as if knowing not where he was,—or what had been done on the day past,—or what was now to be done. The tent above him, at length, caught his eye, dimly visible by the moonlight; and recollection came fully upon him. Slowly, and stiff in limb, yet with cheerful spirit, he left a bed, soft as down,—so had the benevolent Cyrus cared

for the comfort of the old man,—and, with all proper haste, having performed their ablutions, and donned their simple attire, they kneeled down, in silence to thank God for his protection during the night; to implore a continuance of it during the important day that had begun,—and then, desirous to retire without disturbance to their kind entertainer, in stillness went forth from the tent.

But the vigilance of the great leader was not to be thus eluded. They had not proceeded three steps, when a hand was placed on the shoulder of Michael from behind; and to his ear came the words, “traitor! I seize thee!”

It would have required a strong hand indeed, to seize him in the reality; but the touch was light; the ominous words were in the tone of playfulness; the voice was that of Cyrus.

Having kindly enquired of Zadok, how he had slept; and if he felt quite refreshed from the toils of the day past, he drew Michael apart; and, with tone as deep and impressive in its gravity, as it had just been light, and buoyant in its merriment, said;

“I know, Michael, that the word given to me by thee yestereve, was not spoken lightly; but with thy full purpose to follow it by the act. Yet, at this, the last moment, do I once again urge upon thee, that thou suffer nought, short of impossibility, to hinder thee in the performance. I have had this night a vision, Michael; a strange, strange

vision, or visitation,—I know not what to call it, —to tell which, would indeed fill thee, or any man, with amazement. I will not speak it to mortal ear; lest men should whisper that Cyrus is beside himself. I tell thee this, however, Michael; that *thou* wert in that vision; singly in battle wert thou, against hundreds; save that, above thy head, floated, on wings hued like the brightest clouds of morning, a majestic shape, moulded, as seemed, of the solid sunshine; who, with a sword of lightning, touched, and cast down, all who lifted weapon against thee. I saw thee afterwards, Michael, among a great multitude who, by my command,—I know not wherefore given,—were going forth to build up, on a hill, in midst of a city, a wondrous temple. I know not where standeth such city; nor heard I in my vision the name thereof: but, even as in my sleep, so do I see it now, through the mind's eye,—a rock-like hill; a temple of whitest stone, and a great radiance of gold round about it."

"I know the city, and the hill; and the temple that is thereon to be built, O Cyrus!" said Michael, in a fervor of holy expectation: "for it is written by the pen of God-inspired prophets, that even thus shall be done, through thee. That city, Cyrus, is Jerusalem: that temple, is the temple of Israel's God,—a blackened ruin now; but destined, by thy command, chosen of heaven! to be re-edified, to even more than pristine glory."

"Thou amazes me!" said Cyrus, in deep

whisper, as he drew Michael farther aside:—"this temple, thus on a hill, in midst of a city,—is the rebuilding of such temple, and by command from me, a thing absolutely foretold, as thou sayest, by prophets among thy people?"

"Even so, Cyrus: with thine own eyes thou shalt read it in the sacred book," replied Michael.

"Get me to see that book, Michael, I conjure thee," returned Cyrus, with earnest tone: "for, verily, there seemeth a coming together of strange things. But thou art impatient to be gone. I have thy promise to return hither on the morrow, if no actual impossibility standeth in the way: and I ask thee not to repeat it."

"By the sixth hour of to-morrow,—Heaven not opposing,—I will be with thee, Cyrus."

"Then go: and may thy God, and all gods, have you both in their keeping!" said the prince fervently. "At what gate enter ye?"

"At the Belidian," was the reply.

"Those soldiers," said Cyrus, pointing to three men, a little in advance of them, "wait to conduct you across the moveable bridge over the trench. Thine aged relative would find the task hard to clamber up the steep bank."

With a friendly embrace to Michael, and a warm pressure of the hand to Zadok, he once more commended them to the care of the gods; then returned to his pavilion.

The Persians' trench was passed; and the two travellers drew nigh to the solid road which

crossed the deep, wide trench of Babylon: that vast trench, which had been made, when the builders of the city dug from the ground the mountain load of clay, of which were constructed the gigantic walls. Nigher as they drew, more and more rose the astonishment of Zadok, at the rock-like height of the wall; the size, and prodigious strength of the brazen gate.

"I am utterly confounded, Michael," he exclaimed, at length, suddenly stopping in his walk. "Surely no power of man can ever break through, or over-climb that wall; or cliff rather! and, against that gate of solid brass, the blow of the heaviest battering ram would be feeble, methinks, as a child's hammer against a granite rock! Knowest thou the measure of that wall's height, Michael?"

"Twice a hundred cubits, men say," was the reply. "But, if the wall is too high, the gate too strong, for the might of man . . ."

"Before the might of God," cried Zadok, interrupting, "they would be swept away, as thistle-down before the tempest! Let us on, Michael, let us on. I see their strength no more: I hear but the great noise of their overthrow!"

They went on: and Michael, at length, with the pommel of his sword, struck on the brazen wicket. In a few moments, they heard the slide of a massive iron plate; and, through bars of iron thick as a man's arm, came forth a voice, demanding their business. No reply, however, was waited for: the

man who spoke, had looked through the bars; and instantly the wicket was dragged open; the keeper of the gate cast his arms round Michael, and sobbed for joy, like a woman on the return of a long-absent husband.

Zadok was startled at first by the suddenness, and the almost violence of the rush upon his nephew; but he soon perceived that the seeming assault was but the outburst of joy, and love, or gratitude inexpressible, towards an object wholly unexpected. In a little while, the man loosened his embrace; and, still grasping one hand, gazed in the face of Michael.

"I have feared for thee, my deliverer," he said, with broken tones; "Nightly, of late, have I dreamed of thee; and the robber's sword, or the lion's fangs, or the lightning, or the whirlwind, were evermore about thee. All gods be thanked that I see thee again! He saved my life," pursued he, addressing Zadok, whose look of astonishment had just caught his notice. "When I was left on the field of battle, wounded almost to death; when, in one hour more, I must have perished by loss of blood,—he found me; he bound up my wounds;—all day had I fought on the side of his enemies; and he knew it;—yet, in his own arms he carried me to his distant tent. Life was ebbing fast; he gave me, by mouthfuls, wine that brought it back: he fed me with food, by morsels, as my strength could take it: with his own hands he washed from my body the dust, the sweat, the

blood that barked my skin. A mother, nursing her dying child, could not have been more tender and unwearying, than he was to me, a stranger, an Egyptian, an enemy. Stay me not, Michael, for I *will* speak. Not for an hour or twain, only, was this, but during a whole moon: and not on me only, was all this more than human kindness: in the same tent,—a goodly and a spacious,—were there a score of suffering soldiers; men of various countries,—some who had fought with, and some who had fought against him,—and on all alike was his charity poured forth, like rain on the good, and on the wicked. But other tents also were there, as we afterwards learned, kept by him for the same use: and to the sufferers therein did he minister, as to us: and, at his own charges, did he hire, for them and for us, men who wrought under his command, to render service unto all. If, for heavenly charity like this, a man would not serve, even unto the death, then is he a monster, and no man. May all gods bless and protect thee, my more than deliverer from death! and if, in aught, I can ever render service to thee, or to thine, or to any living thing on which thou kindly lookest, may Egypt's gods, and Assyria's gods, fling me over to the Spirit of Evil, if, with heart and soul, I do it not!"

"Men are looking on us, my good friend Nebat," said Michael, in soft tone; "and thy zealous regard for me may be wrongly interpreted. Tomorrow, I purpose again to pass forth from thy gate; and the moments may not then be so pre-



cious as now they are. We must go forward. The God of Israel bless thee!"

"And every god bless *thee*!" returned Nebat; "I shall count the hours, till I see thee again."

The travellers moved onward; and again rose the wonder of Zadok, at the astounding thickness of wall through which, by an arched passage, they were now proceeding. From side to side he looked, from end to end, of the vaulted way; and could scarcely believe the assurance of Michael that, such as he there beheld, was the strength of the whole wall that girded the city.

"Let me measure the breadth thereof," he said: then, returning to the entrance, began to walk through the vaulted passage, counting the steps aloud, as he went. "As I live, Michael," he exclaimed, when he had reached the extremity, "the thickness is twenty and nine long paces! And the whole length of the wall, rounding the city is, thou sayest, four hundred and eighty furlongs!\* In what number of ages, then, can it have been built?"

"Of that I know not," was the reply: and, for a time, not another word was spoken. They had emerged from the vault; and saw, at either hand, facing the wall, a row of houses, each extremity of which dwindled to a point, in the distance; and, right before them, another street, spacious, and seemingly of equal length; on either side of which stood a line of tall, full-foliaged trees, through

\* Sixty English miles.

which the newly risen sun shot his fiery beams, kindling leaf and flower, with colors various, and bright, almost, as those of the rainbow.

"These streets seem endless!" exclaimed Zadok, stopping, that he might look, now to the right, now to the left, and now straight before him: "all die away in a point, as I have seen a broad straight road dwindle to nothing across a vast waste. Knowest thou, Michael; the breadth, and the length of these?"

"From the western wall, at which we have entered," replied Michael, "run twenty-five streets, such as that before us; each ending at the Euphrates, which floweth through the city, in a direct line from North to South; and each, in length, sixty furlongs. Beyond the river, and exactly opposite each of these streets, another street, of equal length, extendeth to the Eastern wall. From North to South, in unbroken line, are twenty-five streets, each a hundred and twenty furlongs in length: the breadth of every street being a hundred cubits. The whole city, thou seest, is thus, by the crossing of the streets, cut into squares, six hundred and seventy-six in number; every square being four furlongs, and a half, on each side. Round these squares stand, as thou wilt see, the houses; every house surrounded by its own garden: and the space within the squares, being also employed for gardens; or, in some parts of the city, for yards, workshops, and other such uses."

"I thank thee, Michael," said Zadok, moving onward: "verily not even a dream had I of the wonders of this great city."

In silence they went on, past houses gorgeously decorated with colors, and with sculptured stones of alabaster; each in its garden standing alone, bedded in tree, and shrub, and high-climbing flower. Massive was every habitation, yet few were lofty. Before each, was a richly ornamented porch; gay with colors, and mantled with running flowers. Flowers hung from the flat roofs also: and, looking down over the parapets, were seen, here and there, the faces of those who had thereon made their beds during the night.

To Zadok, all appeared like a city of enchantment,—such as he had heard of in his infancy, from an Arabian woman; and so, bewildered did he at last become, that he ceased altogether to think upon the momentous matter that had drawn him thither from Jerusalem; of the brother whom he had come to save; of the family whom he had longed to know, and to love. The hand of Michael, gently laid on his shoulder, to draw him from the direction in which they had hitherto moved, almost frightened him; so dream-like had become his mood: but he smiled, and was himself again.

Michael had been far too rapt in thoughts of his poor father, his mother, his weak brother, his dearly loved sister,—all so soon to be in his embrace,—to proffer one word to the old man,—pleased, as he saw, like a child. Till these should

have been seen, he strove, as a fancied duty, to check thoughts most active, most persevering in their attacks, of that one noble form, and, as it appeared to him, almost superhuman beauty, which had become the far highest portion of his own existence,—the fragrance of his life's flower. But, before any of these cherished objects could be visited, the means for accomplishing the main purpose of his long journey,—the deliverance of his poor father,—must be attended to. In exchange for part of the jewels, to which Zadok had converted his possessions, in, and around Jerusalem, they must first obtain that amount of gold which had been demanded by Phraortes, as the ransom of Adad: and, for this end, they must resort to one of their own people; a man of much wealth; who, under the semblance of extreme poverty, had, thitherto, evaded the heavy impositions, laid upon all Jews, who were reputed, or even suspected, to possess the means to pay them. It was to seek the house of this man, that Michael now, having touched the shoulder of Zadok, to draw his attention, turned towards the south into another street, spacious as the former; and, in similar manner, lined by a double row of luxuriant trees; and bordered by gardens.

Many persons were, by this time, abroad; clad in long loose dresses of white cotton; caps, of the same material; and wearing sandals on their feet. In the shade of the thickest trees, were already arranged rough pine tables, covered with luscious fruits;

light cakes; honey; milk, and cooling drinks. Large covered vessels of wood, filled with water taken from the Euphrates; and carried about in rough carts, drawn by oxen, or mules, were proceeding from house to house. Now and then, might be seen a man of more pretence to rank, or substance, taking the freshness of the morning air. The dress of such, consisted of a linen vest, descending to the ankles; over this, another, of thin white wool, light almost as silk; and a sash of white silk, loosely tied about the waist. They wore broad-pointed shoes, of light cloth; soled with untanned skin, and turned up at the toe. Their beards were curiously plaited; their hair hung down over the back; and, on the head, was a turban-fashioned cap. The whole person was so steeped in perfume, that each seemed to bear about him the odours of his own flower garden. In his hand every man had a cane, or walking-stick, carved on the top; sometimes in the shape of an apple; sometimes in that of an eagle, a lily, or a rose,—for, to carry a stick without some such device upon it, was forbidden by their law,—and, on the third finger of the right hand, each man wore a seal-ring.

All these little sights, and peculiarities, attracted the eye of Zadok; but, by Michael, passed quite unnoted. Once more he altered the direction of their walk, till they reached certain houses which, though equal in size to those already seen, and surrounded, like them, by gardens, bore the appear-

ance of belonging to people of humbler order. The gay colors, that had once adorned the walls, had almost perished. Signs of dilapidation were about the parapets, and porches: the gardens looked neglected: the sound of numerous voices announced, that the habitations were much more densely peopled than those previously beheld. Before one house, at length, more abject in appearance than any other, Michael stopped. Passing the wilderness of garden, they reached the porch: he knocked gently on the door; and, after brief delay, during which they were cautiously scrutinized from within, the travellers were admitted.

## CHAPTER IX.

NOT easy, even in those days, was the task to arrange, betwixt two of the children of Israel, the terms of a bargain; even when the commodities in question were, respectively, precious stones, and the precious metal; and much was the great soul of Michael tried by the long-continued debate. The nobler spirit of Zadok, indeed, would at once have consented to terms much more favorable to the gold-merchant than to himself; but the conditions, demanded by Ziglag, savored so of a sordidly avaricious mind, that the just and generous one was stirred to resistance: and time, precious in the estimation of Michael as the gold itself, was thus needlessly wasted.

Meantime, stirred, in spite of herself, by the enthusiastic expectation of Miriam, that Michael would be early with them that day, Hamutal had, for a while, delayed their morning meal; and, with brightening face, had, more than once, looked out from the porch, hoping to catch sight of her noble son, as he entered the gate of the garden. Saddened, and disappointed at last, she had ordered

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the usual food ; and, almost in silence, had it been taken. Not one jot, indeed, had Miriam abated in her confidence, that Michael was approaching,—though she forbore the expression of it, as it seemed to agitate her feeble mother,—and still, at every slight sound, her eye flashed, her head turned quickly, as that of the nursing nightingale, when she hears the wing of her mate, bringing food for their young.

Thanks to the Giver of all things had been offered for their simple meal: the table had been cleared: mother and daughter had seated themselves at some light task of the needle; and Jubal, accompanying himself on a small harp of few strings, was singing to them a Psalm of David, when, during a brief pause, a cry without was heard.

“Cease, Jubal, cease,” said Miriam—starting up, “some evil thing is doing!”

Again the cry was heard,—and in haste she left the chamber. With pale faces, the mother and son sat listening. The sound was distant; but it spake of great affliction. Again, and again it arose. The listeners trembled, and sat in silence. With agitated look, at length, Miriam entered.

“We must strengthen our hearts to endure; and place all our trust in God,” she said, taking the trembling hand of her mother betwixt her own: “some new persecution, I fear, is abroad. Shamgar hath been out to learn of this thing; and saith, that officers of the tyrant have just seized,



and carried off to prison, our friendly neighbours, Heber, and Abimelech. Wherefore, they said not; and none knoweth. Nay, they laid hand even upon Sara, the daughter of Heber, to take her away also: but, so cried she out in her terror, falling down also in a fit, that they cursed, and left her. What meaneth this, mother,—this seizure of women! Alas! there can be, I fear, but one interpretation of such act: and, if for like purpose they come hither, sooner will I pour out my own blood, than submit to follow them, as food for their brutality!”

“May our God protect thee, and all of us, my child!” said Hamutal, holding up her thin hands, as in prayer. “But, mayst thou not, Miriam, be thankful that Michael is not here, on this evil day; else, might not his lot have been as that of Heber, and Abimelech?”

“Our God would protect him here, as He did in the battle-field,” exclaimed Miriam, with a proud confidence in her brother:” and he would protect *us*, dearest mother: for the strength of our great Samson, thou knowest, is in his right hand; and no man can stand before him. But, my mother, be it for good, or be it for evil, again I say to thee, that, of a surety will Michael soon be here; for my soul feeleth his spirit drawing nigh! Even as the cloud sheweth when the sun is coming up,—so is my soul lightened by the coming of my brother!”

She paused, and stood silent,—her lips apart,

and quivering,—her eyes wide, and flashing. “He comes,” she said in whisper; holding forth her arms, as if preparing for an embrace,—“Hark! I hear voices! ’Tis he!”

With almost a shriek of joy, she flung wide the door; and her footsteps could not be counted, for their quickness.

The mother and son stood trembling with joyful expectation. A sound of laughter, and sobs, was heard approaching; and soon, carrying the overwrought girl in his arms, his face beaming happiness, Michael entered: gently disengaged the unconsciously clinging hands of his sister; placed her softly on a couch; and then, in long, and almost silent embrace, held his beloved mother; dropping tears upon her, as she, in turn, was pouring them upon him. After a while, he put forth one hand for Jubal: and, finally, bethought him, that their great and noble friend remained all this time, unnamed, and unnoticed.

“Our God bless thee, my mother!” he said; and removed his arms;—gave one hasty kiss and embrace to poor Jubal; and then, seeing Zadok yet standing at the door, and looking on with moist eyes, took him by the hand, and brought him to his mother.

“My father’s brother,” he said, “and our most kind friend and benefactor. He bringeth the ransom for my father: and our home will henceforth be his home also!”

“May the God of Israel bless thee, Zadok, my

brother!" exclaimed Hamutal, taking his hand, and offering the kiss of love.

But the warm-hearted old man put aside her hand; clasped her in his arms, with a long embrace; and kissed her on either cheek, on the forehead, and on the lips.

Miriam was just rising from the couch; and, till then, had not been conscious of his presence. She saw him now, and cried out; "'Tis he whom I saw in my trance!"

Starting up, she went towards him, and seized his hand. "I have seen thee before,—with my soul's eye: thou art the friend of my brother. I saw thee with him, yestereve."

"The *uncle* of thy brother, Miriam," said Michael; "Zadok of Jerusalem, our dear father's brother; and hither come, to be his deliverer from prison.

Miriam sank on one knee before him; bowed her head; repeatedly kissed the hand, which she still held; and said, "Oh may the God of Israel shower upon thee, my beloved uncle, his choicest blessings! for thou bringest to us a blessing, greater than all the world's riches!"

"And may He shower upon thee, my child, and upon all of you, every good that He seeth fit," exclaimed the old man. "Arise, my child; and let me look upon thy face; for methought, in the one moment's glance, that I beheld the countenance of my mother; as she must have been in her virgin day-spring. Thou *art* she!" he exclaimed, as he gazed upon her, after she had risen: "thou

art the opening bloom of that flower which I remember in its full-blown beauty ! May our God give to his angels the charge over thee ! ”

Fervently he embraced, and kissed her ; and then turned to the pale-cheeked Jubal ; who patiently stood awaiting his turn for the affectionate notice of his uncle. Loving was the greeting of the old man ; reverential and affectionate the embrace, and the words of the youth. The board was again speedily covered ; and the hungry travellers ; having solemnly invoked a blessing upon it, sat down to the repast. But, slow was its progress ; for, more than the body after food, did the mind hunger for a knowledge of many things.

First, and chief, in the thoughts of Michael, was the desire to learn how fared his unhappy father : and dark grew his brow when Hamutal confessed that, by the positive command of Adad himself, neither she nor Miriam had, during the two past moons, attempted to visit his prison. A glance of her eye at Miriam, had sufficed to indicate the cause of this prohibition : and, for a moment, there came upon the calm soul of Michael, a great swell, like the wave which sometimes bursts upon the shore, while the sea beyond lies quiet as a lake. Had Phraortes, in that moment, been within reach, a blow from the suddenly clenched hand, might have ended his tyrannies at once. But the wave retired ; and left almost a calm sea again.

“ And Naomi ? ” he asked, anxiously, in a whisper to Miriam,—“ and Ruth ? ”

"Yesterday they were well," was the reply.

The upturned eye, clasped hands, and slightly moving lips, indicated the fervent thanks, silently sent to heaven.

"And our people all,—how hath the time gone with them?" he said.

"Till this day," replied Miriam, "even as during long time past. But some new and great evil is coming upon us, I fear. Heber, and Abimelech, our friends, have this morning been taken by officers of the king from their own houses: and violent hands were laid even upon the beauteous Sara, to drag her also away, But, in her great terror, she was smitten by a fit; and the robbers left her. Our God grant they may not come hither!"

"So that, for few days to come, they leave us untouched," said Michael, "not much power for mischief will, as I believe, after that, remain unto them. But, meantime, my mother, let lock and bolt be on, by day and by night, when I am away; and open them unto none. When I am here, perilous will it be to any man, or men, who dare to lay the hand on thee, my sister: and perilous would it prove, I doubt, even to my own soul: for, as I live, such thing should never be done! If bolt and lock be burst open; then, my mother, let Miriam, for brief time, be hidden where our holiest of treasures hath been so long in safety."

"What meanest thou, Michael?" asked Miriam, quickly and earnestly: "what is about to be; that,

after few days, as thou sayest, our tyrants will have little power to torment us?"

"I believe, Miriam," replied Michael, in low solemn tone, "I believe, mother, that the long-predicted judgment of God upon this city, will, in few days, be executed. But, of this, ye must ask me no more: nor word must ye speak to any one, touching that which hath been spoken by me. I come from the presence of Cyrus; and greatly hath he honored me, by giving to me a glimpse of that which, from all men else, he hath kept concealed. Let this knowledge suffice to shew you, that I speak not idly; and let it satisfy you, farther, that I may not thereof speak more."

A short silence followed; for all felt that farther enquiry would be at once improper, and useless. On other matters of private interest, however, discourse was free, and earnest; till Hamutal, at length, when she supposed that her son had nearly finished his meal, laid her hand on his arm, and softly said—"thy father."

She added no other word; for the look, and tone, in their own language, said to him,—“thy poor father lieth all this time in his wretched prison; and knoweth not that help draweth nigh: wilt thou not leave all else to a future hour; and run to take off his fetters, and bring him to his home?”

Unspoken by the tongue, such were the words told by the look, and the tone; and the heart of her son understood them.

“Alas! my mother,” he replied, “the time hath

not yet come. The drunken tyrant riseth never before the third hour hath passed: oft-times not until the sixth. Nevertheless, right gladly will I at once depart; for not more, while journeying through the desert, did I thirst for the pure fountain, than now I thirst to behold again my life's fountain; my beloved father! Hang up my sword, Miriam. Much have I prayed to our God, that never again may I have command to use it in battle: but I fear,—I fear!"

Miriam took from his hand the mighty weapon; and hung it in its accustomed place. Michael received from Zadok a purse, containing the ransom of Adad: cordially embraced, and thanked the old man: embraced, and kissed his mother, sister, and brother;—commended them all to the care of God; and then, attired just as he had come from his long journey, set forth for the house of the tyrant lord.

"May heaven's blessings go with him!" said Hamutal, as her son disappeared: "And now, brother Zadok, to beguile the anxious time, tell us, I pray thee, of Jerusalem; and of all the wonders ye have met with on your way."

## CHAPTER X.

ZILLAH, the venerated daughter of king Zedekiah; with Abinoam her husband, and those pearls among Israel's daughters, Naomi and Ruth, sat, after the morning meal, in loving discourse together, when, suddenly, a handmaiden burst into the chamber. "Oh master, master, hide thyself," she cried, "for the officers of the king are come to . . . ."

"To save him the trouble, my precious maid of Judah," said a rough man, laying his hand upon her; "and, for the penalty of thy offence against justice, to kiss thee on the mouth."

He seized the trembling maiden as he spake; and coarsely kissed her again and again, on mouth, cheek, and bosom.

"Thou beast!" she cried angrily; freeing herself at last from his grasp, and smiting him on the cheek.

"And thou, daughter of a she-dog!" vociferated the brute, striking her so violently on the side of the head, that she staggered, and almost dropped: "Thou shalt be taught fitter behaviour to thy masters."



"What means this insolence and barbarity?" cried Naomi, starting up, and advancing towards the intruder, with a look of indignation; and speaking in a tone which, for a moment, fixed him to the spot. "From whom comest thou; and with what right dost thou presume to lay thy brutal hand upon our maiden?"

"With what right did she lay her hand upon my cheek?" said the man, at length: "and with what right did she advise her master yonder to escape from the hand of justice? We come for the old Jew, by command that cannot be resisted,—even by command of Sarsechim, the king's chief minister: and hold not thou thy head too high, damsel of Israel,—for there are others who come to bear away . . . ."

"Be silent, Rabmag," said one who at that moment entered. "Remove thy prisoner; and get thee gone. Abinoam, take with thee what thou wilt; for no man can tell when thou mayst return. But delay not; or the rough hand may hasten thee."

"May we not ask," demanded Naomi, deathly pale, yet firm, "wherefore this seizure of a venerable man; against whom, during two score years and ten, no tongue hath spoken word of reproach?"

"The cause, damsel," replied the officer, bowing, "is the pleasure of the king. No man presumeth to ask for cause beyond that cause. The will of Baal himself is not more beyond question."

Well did the venerable Israelite know, that oppo-

sition to the movement of an earthquake, would not be more vain, than resistance to the command of the tyrant. Speechless, pale, and trembling, he embraced his weeping, though almost senseless wife ; his quivering, sobbing Ruth ; his pallid, but eye-flashing Naomi : took his cap and cloak, and walking staff ; then, casting on all one look of utter wretchedness, went forth.

Naomi darted from the chamber ; and, ere he had proceeded half way through the garden, overtook him ; thrust a purse into his hand, while seeming to lay upon his arm a mantle of fine wool ; once more kissed, embraced, bade him trust in God ; and then slowly returned.

She had noted that a richly gilded chariot stood at the gate ; but thought not, at the moment, farther of it. The purpose for which it had been brought, soon, however, became apparent. On her re-entrance to the chamber, she found her mother and sister weeping violently : the officer standing silent.

"The pleasure of the king is one cause," she said, drawing near to him, "but another, and sudden cause, there *must* be, for this act against an old, feeble, and most harmless man. Tell me, for charity, if not for justice, wherefore hath this been done. Hath any evil tongue . . . ."

"I can tell thee nought, damsel," replied the officer. "By the might of Baal I swear to thee, that I know nought. An hour since, came the command from Sarsechim, the chief minister, to

carry away Abinoam, the Jew, to prison. He is gone; and to speak farther on that matter were useless. But, if the king displeaseth you in this, yet, in another thing, doeth he to thee and to thy sister high honour. Bid her cease her wailing; and I will speak to you both; for it is a great glory that awaiteth you."

Naomi cast on him a glance like a shooting fire; and remained for a short time silent. "We desire no glory that a king can give," she replied; "no favor but that of being permitted in quietness to serve our God. Ruth," she continued, putting her hand on her sister's trembling arm, "give ear to that which is to be said unto us."

The rose had fled from the lovely cheeks of Ruth; but large dew-like drops trickled fast down them.

"Do not let thy heart sink thus within thee, young maiden," said the officer. "Though, for his own just reasons, the king hath taken from thee for a time thy father, yet will he give unto you both that which is a far greater blessing, and an honour for which all the women of Babylon will envy you. Your great beauty, damsels of Israel, hath reached the ear of the king of kings; and he hath commanded that ye be brought before him."

Ruth shrieked, and fell back in her mother's arms.

"For what purpose?" demanded Naomi.

"That he may behold your loveliness," returned the officer, smiling, as if conscious of opening to

them a vision of glory and happiness. "And when he hath seen, as I now see it, sure am I that ye will find favor in his sight."

"How meanest thou?" demanded Naomi, with voice agitated by conflicting emotion; yet with a look of defiance to the death; "in what fashion are we to find favor in his sight?"

"Even in that fashion which the most delighteth and uplifteth the heart of woman,"—replied the officer, raising his hands and eyes, the better to speak his sense of such distinction; "as the beloved of his bosom, as the sharers of the royal couch!"

"And I tell thee, man," said Naomi, with voice of terrible determination, and eyes that gave out lightning,— "I tell thee that, rather than have such honor, I would leap headlong from the top of Babel! would die by famine; by poison; by the knife; or, failing all else, would dash my brains out against the wall!"

"By Nisroch! I believe thee," said the officer, retreating from her; and almost in dismay. "But thou wilt have time to consider farther: and mayst judge better: or the king, mayhap, may not see thee as I see thee; or thou mayst have eloquence to dissuade him from his purpose, if he *do* desire thee. But, be that as it may, the one thing to be done, is, to take you both before him. If I fail to do this, my head will not be mine many hours longer. A royal chariot waiteth for you at the gate: resistance, or flight, is impossible; for, in the next chamber, four armed men await my orders.

Get you then ready, at your speediest: and go with me without word, or sign of unwillingness,—so shall your departure, and your journey, be the quicker, and the pleasanter to you."

"Ruth," said Naomi, in a tone of strange calmness: "dry up thy tears, my sweet sister: and put on thy walking attire. We must attend this royal messenger: but shall soon, I trust, return. My mother," embracing her affectionately, "may the God of Israel guard, bless, and support thee! Fear not too much for our father: soon, very soon, he will, he must be released: and, for us, fear not at all. In little while, doubt not, we shall return to thee."

Ruth also, at the same time, threw her arm round the neck of Zillah; and sobbed out love and blessing. Almost stunned by this sudden blow of sorrow, the venerable parent could scarcely speak the words of farewell. Embracing both together, she implored God to be their shield against all evil: and, finally, covering her eyes with her hands, whispered them to go. Naomi took the hand of Ruth, and drew her tenderly away. With faces closely hidden beneath the hood, so that neither the streaming eyes of Ruth, nor the marble fixedness of Naomi, could be seen, slowly they walked through the garden to the gate. The royal chariot awaited. In silence they mounted: the officer took his place behind them: his assistants sprang on their horses; and, without noise, or external show of affliction, the pearls of Israel went on toward the great beauty-treasury of Babylon's Pagan tyrant.

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## CHAPTER XI.

WELL for himself, and for all that he loved, was it, that the strong foot of Michael, sorely tempted, while on his way to the palace of Phraortes, to go from the direct line, though but a few hundred paces, that he might pass the house wherein dwelt his soul's soul,—well was it for him, and for all, that the voice of filial duty within him said, “stir thou not from the direct path.” Had he listened to the musical call of love, and walked before the gate of Abinoam, the royal chariot, waiting thereat, would have raised suspicion of its purpose. To the house assuredly would he have hasted; and, in the suddenness of the occasion, might have done things harmful, in the end, to all; and bringing on himself heart-sorrow and remorse. “Thy father, thy father,” said the voice within, as for one moment he stopped, irresolute: and Michael obeyed the call. With swift foot he went on; and stood at length before the door of the palace.

“Let it be told to thy master,” he said to an eunuch who sat within the porch, “that Michael, the son of Adad, hath come from Jerusalem; and hath brought that which was required of him.”

“Our lord sleepeth yet,” was the reply: “or if

be waketh, hath not yet given signal that he would arise. He revelled last night with the king, till the night was far spent; and may not stir, perchance, before the fifth hour."

"My father, Adad, is here; and imprisoned," said Michael: "may I not be admitted unto him?"

"Didst say thou hast brought the gold that he oweth to our lord?" enquired the man.

"I have with me the price of his ransom," was the reply.

"Then haply . . . Ibzan," he cried, to a black eunuch who was that instant passing through the inner chamber; "Here is the son of the Jew Adad, come to pay his father's debt. Is our lord stirring yet?"

"He hath awakened; but will not rise before the fifth hour," was the reply; "I bear to him a drink that he hath called for."

"Wilt thou make known to him," said Michael, stepping forward, "that the son of Adad hath come hither, with the gold for his father's ransom; and beggeth that he may be admitted to his prison, until it be the pleasure of the lord Phraortes to summon him to his presence."

"I will report what thou sayest," replied Ibzan, and glided away.

The eunuch resumed his seat; and Michael, patient, though anxious, stood waiting the reply. From his head to his foot, again and again gazed the eunuch on the motionless figure before him:

marvelling at the great stature; the prodigious size of limb; the vast depth, and breadth of chest; the quiet, yet, to his fancy, terrible expression of face: but his attention, at last, was drawn to the habiliments of the stranger.

"Thou art scarcely in fit condition to stand before our lord, young Israelite," he said, at length, in tone of reproach. "Thy tunic is not of the finest, or the newest; and thy boots, methinks, might have travelled the desert, for the dust there is on them."

"I am but this morning arrived from Jerusalem," returned Michael; "and held the release of my father a more immediate concern than the adornment of my person. Thy lord will take no heed of the boot or tunic of him that bringeth gold."

"Be not too sure of that," began the reply,—but, at that instant, Ibzan returned, and commanded Michael to follow him.

Through a long, broad, and lofty passage; the walls of which were covered with paintings, whose various and brilliant colors struck the sight, though they could not arrest his attention, Michael followed his conductor; and was, at length, ushered into a sleeping apartment, redolent of perfumes; and in which,—first objects that caught his eye,—were two small fountains, flinging up slender jets of water, that fell with a gentle tinkling into basins of white marble. Through the soft twilight, appeared at the remoter end of the large chamber a bed, and from the bed came a hoarse voice.



"Hast thou the gold, Jew?"

Michael took from the inside of his tunic a large bag; and replied, "It is here, my lord. How fareth my father?"

"I know not, Jew," was the haughty reply; "what mattereth that unto me? Pay thou the ransom quickly; and take him with thee: and be thankful that he hath fared so well. Yet, once gone from me, look that thou keep him safe; for the anger of the king is gone out against thy people: and, of your chief men, have there been hundreds this day cast into prison."

"What new cause of offence hath been given?" asked Michael.

"The king hath been told of plottings among you," replied Phraortes; "and of your secret talking together, concerning prophecies of evil things against this city. I know not all; and cannot hold farther talk with thee. The king willeth; and that is enough. Ibzan,—send hither Kenaz: and bid him bring scales, for the weighing of gold."

The black eunuch hastened away; and Michael, after short silence, gently, but firmly, said, "Before I pay down this ransom, my lord Phraortes, but just were it that I see him for whom it is to be given."

"Dost thou dare to suspect, insolent Jew, that I would receive the gold, if it were not rightly due to me?" cried the honorable lord, half raising himself from the bed. "Were I inclined to deal

harshly, or unjustly towards you, what hinders that I take the gold, and yet keep both thy father and thyself in bonds."

"Kind and just, truly, hast thou shewn thyself, execrable tyrant!" said Michael in his heart; then aloud; "I would but know of a surety that my father liveth," said he: "for, when, but now, I asked how fared he, thou hadst not knowledge of his condition. He is aged and feeble; and, in such, life is uncertain."

"He was alive yesterday eve, I remember me now," said Phraortes; "for I saw, and spake unto him, but short time before I received summons to the banquet of the king: and living is he now, doubtless. But I am weary of this.—Kenaz," he proceeded, addressing his treasurer, who at that moment entered: "take thou this man down to the pleasant chamber of his father, Adad, the Jew: and, if ye find the old man living, then weigh thou carefully the gold that the young man hath brought for payment of his father's debt to me. Thou knowest the weight required: and thou wilt look well at the quality of the metal; for, by Nisroch! these Jews are, to the very marrow, extortioners and cheats. If thou find all right, then bid the jailer remove the fetters; and see thou that the old man go forth with his son. And now, get ye gone, both; for my head swimmeth yet, by reason of the last night's carouse; and sleep seemeth almost dearer to me than the gold itself."

"Kenaz," he cried aloud, the instant they had

left the chamber; and the treasurer returned to him. "Come hither," pursued the just lord; and Kenaz drew close to him. "I remember me now," said Phraortes in whisper, "that the old Jew was indisposed last night. If thou find him dead, take, nevertheless, the gold; for it were not equitable that I should be the loser, because the filthy old fellow may choose to become carrion. If the young fool resist, call in help; take off the irons from the body: put them upon him; and make sure of the gold. But have strength enough of men; for he looketh as though he would strike like a battering-ram."

"The command of my lord shall be obeyed," replied the treasurer; bowed low, and softly retired.

Willingly did Michael leave a presence, the very air of which seemed poisoned with a spiritual vileness; even as the atmosphere about a carcase is fouled by the vileness of bodily corruption. In silence he followed Kenaz to the door of the dungeon; his great heart sounding like the strokes of an engine. While yet descending the dark stairs of brick, he heard an agitated voice from below. "He cometh! he cometh! I knew that he would come! My son! my son! I thank thee, O my God!"

The strong bolts were withdrawn by the jailer; and the door thrust back; disclosing the dark, airless hole. By the dim light, Michael beheld the grey-headed old man on his knees; with his shaking hands uplifted, as he still blessed and

thanked his God. Michael sprang towards him : raised, tenderly embraced ; and whispered ; " be calm, my beloved father : speak not a word : thy wife and children are well ; and long to embrace thee. Be calm, and speak not. The dawn hath risen ; and a happy day cometh."

Scarcely could the old man, almost convulsed by the sudden joy, withdraw his arms from the body of his son. Terrible to the ear of Michael was the rattle of the fetters on his shaking limbs. Suddenly, however, the clinging arms dropped.

" Enough of this," said Kenaz, in harsh voice. " My lord waiteth : bring forth the gold."

" Assure thyself," said Michael, in quiet tone, " that the full measure, and more, will be given to thee ; but, meanwhile, command thou, I pray thee, that the fetters be unlocked ; so mayst thou the sooner return to thy lord's presence."

" Set him loose," said Kenaz to the jailer, pointing to the prisoner : and the man, not unwillingly, brought forth a large, quaint, clumsy key ; and applied it to the 'fetter-locks. The manacles dropped ; and the poor old man, like a bird standing at the opened door of its cage, and flapping its wings ere it try their strength in flight, stretched out his withered arms ; and, with staggering feet, strode the short limit of his dungeon ; as if conscious that boundless space would soon be before him ; and that he might go on, even to the uttermost end of the earth. For a moment, even the callous treasurer looked with a strange smile at



drew from his garment a stone; on which, with light pressure, he rubbed piece after piece, till he was satisfied that all were genuine. Returning then the whole to the bag, he tied it up; and bade Michael to bring along his father, and follow him.

His walking staff had been taken from a corner, by the panting prisoner; and, leaning heavily on the arm of his son, silently, but with heart beating for joy and impatience, did he follow the steps of him who, wholly unmoved, was about to put him forth to the inestimable blessing of free air, light, and liberty. As though a great load were upon his back, with difficulty could the poor old man, with his stiff and trembling knees, lift his body's weight up the steep stairs. Michael felt him totter: and, putting his mighty arm round him, carried him up as a child. Arrived at the top, he set Adad on his feet again; and, at slow pace, they reached at length the door that led into the garden. Kenaz, for such had been the command of his lord, accompanied them thither; and, with his own hand, prepared to fling wide the portal that divided the prison-house from heaven's glorious temple,—sky, pure air, and sunshine.

“Be on thy guard, young Israelite,” he said, in low tone, to Michael,—for even he was somewhat touched by the devoted love of the son to his aged father,—“be on thy guard. Thy people are, just now, hateful in the sight of the king. Many of them are this day cast into prison: and the old man, and thyself also, may haply not escape.”

"I thank thee," replied Michael, bowing; and, in the next instant, the door was drawn open; and the air, and the full blaze of day came upon them. Adad, who, even while passing through the subdued light within the house, had been compelled to half close his eyes, so long accustomed to the dungeon's darkness, felt suddenly as if blinded by lightning. He shut his eye-lids; bent his head; stopped, and staggered. Michael perceived instantly the cause; and said, with cheering tone; "lean firmly on me, my father: keep close thine eyes for a while; and put forward thy foot boldly. Well will I heed that nought stumble thee."

Heavily leaned the old man on the strong arm; heavily he leaned on his staff also,—and boldly did he put forward his feeble feet. In silence they went on, till they had passed through the gate, and stood in freedom within the wide street. Beneath the shadow of the long line of trees Michael conducted him: and all the delicious sounds of open air, and liberty of motion,—the foot of steed, the low of oxen, the cheerful bark of dog, the song of bird, the breath of air amid leaves, the voice of man, the sweeter tones of woman, the laugh and prattle of children,—all fell like a music on the old man's soul; a music sweeter than aught from string of harp, or breath of richest flute.

"Oh my God!" exclaimed he softly, as they stole onward, "how ungrateful is man to thee for thy most blessed of gifts! We complain, if our food be not savory; we are discontented, if the

sun shine too hot; or if the rain descend, when we would go abroad: we are unhappy, if our neighbour have the riches that we have not; or if he be clothed in finer raiment than we: we are abashed, or mortified, or angered, if he look proudly upon us: we are distempered, and say that life is nought, if we cannot obtain all that we strive after: we think ourselves afflicted with misery, if a limb, or a tooth, do but ache! Ah! Michael! for all this malady of mind, a sad, but a sure physic, is the dungeon! Therein will the weak, discontented man too soon be taught, that God's free gifts to all, though little prized *because* free, and unpurchased, are a thousand times more precious than aught else which the hoarded riches of the East could buy! Take man away from the boundless sky, God's dwelling place; take from him God's air, and light: shut him up where there is no visible sign of the Creator's hand and presence,—but tokens of man's cruelty only: forbid him to move freely his limbs; shut him out from all the sounds of earth, and water, and air,—from the song of the bird, the tones of the beast, and the voice of human kind: bury him thus from Nature, and from all that speaks of Nature's God,—and then, let him have all the gold, the diamonds, the rubies of the world spread before him: put on his head a crown worth ten empires: let thousands of lords fall down and silently worship him, as they would worship the King of kings: let his table be heaped with luxuries; his bed be



softer than down,—‘Ah!’ would he cry, ‘give me liberty! give me the air, the light of heaven; set me alone on a mountain’s top, ragged and poor, and foodless; but free,—do but this,—and all my gold, my jewels, my crown, my luxuries, my knee-worship, would I give in the exchange, gladly as the merchant would give dust for diamonds.’ Oh Michael! my soul sinketh within me, to think of that which hath been.”

“Try then, my father, to think of it no more,” said Michael, with cheering tone: “and let us sit a while within the hollow of this tree; where we shall be cooler; and be unobserved, while thou dost rest thyself; for many eyes have been cast on us; and it were well to escape notice, when we may.”

“Guide my steps within the tree, my son,” said Adad; “for, as yet, I have not had strength of sight to look fully at aught.”

A Terebinth tree, of immense size, quite hollow, and provided with a seat running round the interior,—stood now before them. Michael had entered; and, giving a caution not to trip over a projecting root, was just about to lead his father in by the hand, when the old man stopped; and, with closed eyes, slightly raising his face, stood inhaling through the nostril; like one who delightedly catches the faint perfume of some exquisite flower-bed at distance.

“My son,” he exclaimed, in low, almost agitated tone, “I breathe the rich fragrance of God’s deli-

cious fruits! and surely, also, if I dream not, the ethereal breath of the pure fountain water!"

"A water-tank standeth not far from us," replied Michael, somewhat marvelling at the unwonted keenness of sense in his poor father: "and, under shade of a tree, some fifty paces hence, standeth a table, covered with fruits for the refreshment of those who walk abroad. Wouldst thou that I bring unto thee of such?"

"Oh my son, my son! for three moons past have I been hungered and athirst! and nought, save a morsel of bread, unfit for even a starved dog, and filthy water from the ditch, have been given unto me. Even of these, once only in the four and twenty weary hours. My vitals are parched up! my very soul seemeth to thirst for the life-sustaining fruits; the sweet water which our God hath given to man! Haste thee, my son, haste thee; for, now that I have caught the heavenly fragrance, I shall die if they come not unto me!"

Without a word, Michael drew his father within the hollow trunk; placed him on the seat; and hastened away. But the poor sufferer could not sit there, when the delicious breath of fruits, and the spirit of crystal water, might be caught, by standing in the open air. He returned to his former place; and again took in ravenously the divine odors. Little by little, he opened his eyes also, and looked forth; that he might behold the coming of his son, and the inestimable treasure that he would bring.

But the step of Michael came to his ear, before

his weak eyes could steadfastly look upon aught. Cautiously he trod back, and resumed his seat; that he might be ready for the enjoyment of the blessing. In a moment after, Michael was before him: in one hand a cup of cool clear water; in the other, a small basket, containing light, delicate cakes, and fruits; the fragrance from which went up, like a morning mist from the teeming earth. With both trembling hands, the old man seized the cup; for one instant turned up his eyes, and silently gave thanks to God; then lifted it, and drank. His whole face began to beam enjoyment intense,—his wrinkled brow became smooth as that of a child,—his eyes gradually opened, dilated, and sparkled, as with the fire of youth. A reluctant touch of his son's hand, at length, warned him that it might be prudent to forbear. At once he resigned the cup; and eagerly caught from the basket a bunch of almost bursting grapes; yellow as gold, and fragrant as flowers. Again he mutely thanked God; and began the delicious repast. With an eagerness like that of a famished animal, did he eat; and with a total devotedness, as if his whole sense of being were absorbed in the act; as if, for him, there were no other reality in the universe.

Michael looked in silence at the piteous spectacle of a venerable, high-minded man; reduced to the condition of a starving creature of the wilderness: and within the depths of his soul began to gather a darkness, which threatened, at some time, to fall in thunder and fire on the head of the accursed tyrant. After a while, he offered to the poor old

man a delicate cake. Adad knew well, that, for his own health's sake it was, that the less tempting food was given : and thankfully, therefore, he took it ; and laid down the fruit, and ate.

" I am ashamed, my son," he said at last, " to eat before thee thus, almost like a wolf perishing of hunger : but, surely, even the food of angels cannot be, to them, so unspeakably delicious, as these blessings of our God for man are to me this day. But enough," he said at length ; " the ravening fit hath passed ; and the food after which I now yearn, is the embrace of my wife, my Miriam, my poor Jubal. Let us go forward, my son ; for I am refreshed, and strong ; and the thirst is now within my soul !"

He arose as he spake thus ; grasped his staff ; and, unassisted, went forth. Taking in one hand the basket and the cup, and presenting to his father the disengaged arm, Michael went silently forward, till they reached the table of the fruit-seller. With thanks, he returned the cup ; gave to a hungry-looking man the remainder of the fruit,—and then, but still in silence, for he feared to draw attention on them, supported his father's steps, till they drew nigh to their own house.

The gate was shut and bolted, as Michael had bidden : but there had long been eager eyes peering through crevices : and, as they came near, bolts leaped back,—open flew the gate,—and wife, daughter, and son, were in a moment embracing, and kissing the poor old man, almost insane with joy. One slight hysterical cry came from Miriam :

but Michael touched her; held up his finger in warning; and so spake to her, with the soul-language of eye, and feature, of the danger she might cause, that, in an instant, she mastered the passion. "Keep silent all, and go within," he said, in low, earnest tone: and all at once obeyed. Hamutal grasping one hand; Miriam the other; Jubal, a little in advance, looking up into his father's face; and their two household servants weeping, and blessing him,—they went forward in silence, till they had entered their habitation, and closed the door behind them. Then, indeed, was a bursting forth of joy and sympathy, like the great rush of water, when a rain flood falls from the hills.

That he might not interfere with the first outpouring of love between the released prisoner, and his wife and children, Zadok had retired to an unoccupied chamber; and therein remained alone, seeing and hearing in imagination all that might be done, and spoken, at that happy meeting. Long was it, he thought at last, that he had waited; and great was his desire to embrace once more the beloved brother whom, during thirty years, he had not beheld. But he was not forgotten; nor was the duration of his solitude so long as impatient love made it appear to him. With bright face, and cheerful voice, Miriam soon came before him; took him by the hand; and led him to the presence of his anxiously expecting brother. For a moment, each gazed in the face of the other; then hastened to a long and fervent, but silent embrace.

Blessings were at length exchanged ; words of brotherly affection spoken ; tears shed ; prayers for each other uttered ; and then, side by side, and hand in hand, they sat upon the couch : while mother and daughter were diligently engaged in preparing for the feeble and emaciated object of their love, the many comforts which he so sadly needed.

At length the poor sufferer rose, that he might go to the bath ; and put on clean raiment ; and feel again,—not as a caged beast, but as a man.

“My father,” said Michael, taking his hand ; “thou wilt not need me now for a time ; and my soul yearneth to behold Naomi. Give me thy blessing ; and let me go.”

He dropped on one knee, as he spake the last words ; folded his arms on his breast ; and bowed his noble head.

“May the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, bless, and preserve, and prosper thee, my son !” said the old man, laying his hands on the head of Michael, and turning his venerable countenance towards heaven. “May His hand be ever over thee in all thou doest ! In all thy acts, thy words, and the thoughts of thy heart, may He direct thee aright !”

Michael arose ; affectionately embraced, and blessed them all ; and then, having hastily exchanged his soiled travelling dress, for his usual simple attire, with rapid step, and beating heart, departed.

## CHAPTER XII.

WITH rapid step, beating heart, and face beaming happiness, Michael took the way towards the house wherein dwelt the beloved of his soul. Thus joyously, in the bright morning, springs on his steed the gay youth, bounding in fancy over hill and dale; seeing, in his mind's eye, all the wild delights of the chase,—but seeing not the dark chasm, down which, ere noon, he is destined to be hurled! Silently breathing her name; inwardly beholding the majesty of her beauty; hearing the rich music of her voice; feeling the celestial atmosphere of her presence; the soul-shooting touch of her hand,—entranced thus, and almost dead to every sight and sound of external Nature, went on the great-hearted worshipper, till he reached the abode, wherein he looked instantly to behold the object of his spirit's adoration.

Too impatient to wait the arrival of a servant, he went at once into the house; and hurriedly knocked on the door of the chamber in which it was the use of the family to sit. He heard no invitation to enter; but, in its stead, the sobs and low wailings of some one, evidently under deepest affliction. A thick cloud dropped over him, as

if his soul's sun had been suddenly quenched. Slowly he opened the door; and, almost trembling, looked within. The room was darkened: but, on the floor, lay the writhing form that uttered the sounds of anguish. He approached; stooped; and beheld that it was the venerable daughter of king Zedekiah. Touching her on the shoulder, "mother," he said; "what evil hath fallen on us?"

Turning, she beheld him; and, with a slight shriek, raised herself on one arm; "Oh Michael, my beloved son," she cried; "would that I were indeed thy mother; for then, perchance, this evil of all evils would not have come upon us! Help me to rise; for my strength is gone utterly. Michael, Michael," she went on, while he aided her to a couch, "I tremble to tell thee of this worst of all miseries. My heart is broken! Our God, I fear, hath turned away his face from us!"

She had now seated herself; and, wringing her hands, rocking her body, and sobbing convulsively, remained as if incapable of farther utterance. Michael fell on one knee before her; took her hand between his own; and, looking at her with a face that expressed intense torture, said, in a low whisper, "Speak, mother, speak: in pity speak."

"I dare not tell thee, Michael," she groaned out. "Oh God of Israel, have mercy upon us!"

"Where are thy daughters?" said Michael, still in strange whisper. The sole reply was a fresh burst of wailing.



"Where is Abinoam?" again he asked.

"In prison, Michael: carried away by officers of Sarsechim," she cried, in agony.

"And Naomi, and Ruth,"—he asked, in low, hoarse tone: "they have gone with him,—have they not?"

Zillah shook, as in an ague fit; but made no answer.

"Speak to me," said Michael, trembling; "or I may die at thy feet! my heart hath almost stopped."

"Oh my God!" she cried at last; "if, for the sin of my poor father, Thou thus dost visit his children, have mercy! have mercy!"

"They are not dead?" he whispered, shivering.

"No, Michael; worse, far worse! They live; but they are taken from us!"

"By command of the tyrant?" demanded he, starting to his feet,—for he remembered what Miriam had told him of the beautiful daughter of Heber: "have they been seized as the prey of that great beast?"

"Oh my son, my son, thou hast said!" she cried; and flung herself, face downward, on the couch, in an absolute torture of misery.

For a moment Michael was silent. As the shepherd, driving home his scanty flock, when the winter night is coming on, stands aghast on beholding the snowy avalanche fall, and bury them,—so, heart-crushed, stood he when these dreadful tidings fell on his soul. But, as the

good shepherd, the first shock past, calls for help ; and manfully sets about to deliver his charge from death, so Michael, in the next moment, summoned his great heart to be up, and doing. He thought of Cyrus : of his bold declaration that, within four days, Babylon would fall before him : and, though he saw not, nor could conceive the means to accomplish such act, yet firmly did he believe that it would be done. And, for himself, would he *now* hang back ? would he *now* deliberate whether again to draw the sword ? Not for even the moment of the lightning's flash ! Delay, delay, was all that need be obtained. For four days only, could the tyrant be hindered in his purpose, —the prey would be snatched from him. But how ? As yet, he saw not clearly : he would meditate as he went on : he must be moving ; to speak, to do,—though he knew not, as yet, to whom to speak ; or what act should be done.

"Mother," he said, at length, in firm, calm tone ; "Fare thee well ! May our God comfort thee ! Nay, I tell thee, thou *wilt* be comforted. In few days, thy husband, and thy daughters, will be restored to thee. I speak not foolishly ; the hand of God is already put forth, to strike the tyrant ; and to cast down this wicked city before the conqueror ! Dry thy tears, mother. Look to the scriptures of our holy Isaiah : and remember, that the predicted one, the Cyrus appointed by God for our deliverance, is even now come against Babylon. Mother," he went on, in deep whisper, "I

was, last night, and again this morning, in the presence of Cyrus. I may not speak much; nor must thou utter in any human ear that which I speak,—but I tell thee, for thy heart's comfort, that the destroying bolts are prepared; and speedily will be shot. For a few days only, need the tyrant be delayed in his hellish desire; and he will, then, be helpless as a worm! Farewell! Our God protect thee!"

She looked up to him; and, for very astonishment at the calm grandeur of his aspect, his words, and his tones, ceased to weep; and sat silent. He wrung her hand; said, "look not to see me again; for I must be doing;" and, before she could speak, had left the chamber. Zillah struggled up from the couch, and called after him. "Go thou to our Daniel," she said, as he again approached her; "for there is a whisper in my heart that, through him, will God direct thee."

"I receive thy words," he replied; "and even so will I do. But now Time presseth upon me, like a falling hill!" Again he wrung her hand, and departed.

"And now, as I live," said he to himself, as, with long and swift steps, he left the house;—"as I live, will I slay that tyrant; even upon his throne; and in the sight of his lords, and armed men; if better way may not be found. . . . But, first, to the prophet. . . . Yet, stay. . . . Araspes; . . . he hath favor with the monster, as the sole instrument by which to move Croesus; . . . to him

will I now go; . . . nay I have message to him, which he must deliver to the tyrant: . . . Fit occasion to demand instant hearing. Surely, from *him*, the despot will not, dare not, at such time, withhold her whom he hath so long sued to be his wife! And, while pleading for Ruth,—for her sister also may he not justly demand release? . . . If the blinded tyrant refuse—what then? . . . I see not as yet. . . . The first step must be tried. . . . That failing; . . . but methinks it will not; . . . delay, at least, will surely be gained; and, with that, success. Beyond this, I am in darkness! God of our fathers! enlighten and direct me! Oh Naomi! Oh angelic Ruth! But I will not think of them; or my brain will be crazed! They are in God's hands!"

So swift and strong was his step; so terrible the fire of his eye; the marble rigidity of his whole face, while thus he mused, that men went aside, fearful to meet him. He stood, ere long, at the porch of Araspes; and demanded speech with him.

"Our lord is but now going forth," was the reply of the servant, as he looked with some fear at the strong and resolute visitor; "and will not like . . ."

His speech was cut short by the appearance of Araspes himself; and, evidently, equipped for riding. Michael strode on to meet him; and said, promptly; "Speak not to me here; but return within; for I have heavy tidings for thee."

The exclamations of delight, with which Araspes

was about to hail the long absent traveller, at the moment when he recognised him, were arrested suddenly, as the beginning flight of a bird is stopped, when his uprising wing strikes against the roof of his cage. With a sudden pallor on his usually blooming cheeks, he turned back; and, unbidden, Michael followed him to his accustomed chamber. Araspes closed the door; took the hand of Michael; and said; "for the love of the gods, speak; and speak at once."

"Hast thou present favor in sight of the king?" Michael demanded.

"Perchance a little," was the reply: "but wherefore dost thou ask? Michael, thy look shaketh me."

"Then bid forth thy chariot instantly, to go before him. Lose not a moment," he added, seeing that Araspes gazed upon him, as if almost stunned.

The command was given; with utmost haste enjoined; and Araspes then, greatly agitated, looked in the face of Michael, and again said; "Speak to me now! for the love of all gods, speak at once; and speak openly!"

"Nerve thyself to endure," replied his friend; "or thou mayst lose strength to act. Abinoam hath this day been seized by command of Sar-sechim; and carried to prison!"

"That is not all," said Araspes, in a tone of terror, when Michael paused. "I see that a direr evil is behind. Speak,—for I am faint, with apprehension."

"Would to God it were!" exclaimed Michael: "for *that* a remedy might doubtless be found: but, Araspes; . . . Naomi hath been forced away; that she may minister to the carnal appetite of the tyrant!"

Araspes sank upon a couch; and vainly strove to speak. His white lips trembled; his tongue seemed paralysed;—his eyes grew wide and glassy; for he felt that, beyond even this, loomed another, and, for him, still blacker demon of evil.

"Be a man," said Michael, strongly pressing his hand: "there is work for us to do. We are not women, to submit, and weep; but men, to dare, and to do to the death! Rouse thyself, Araspes. Thy head must be cool; thy heart resolved; thine arm like steel. Lift up thy soul, young prince,—for Ruth calleth on thee to help her!"

"I knew it," gasped out the almost fainting youth: "she, too, is taken for a sacrifice! Is it not so?"

"Even so," replied Michael, with sad tone, "so is intended; but never so shall be done."

"Yet, what the remedy?" tremblingly asked the young Lydian.

"The remedy we must *instantly* seek, is, delay," returned Michael. "Hast thou not friends among the lords of the court, who might raise their voices in thy behalf?"

"There is not among them one," replied Araspes, "that dare utter word, in opposal to the king's will. Nor over earnest would they be to plead for

me in any cause,—since little do we think, or speak, or act alike; and slight, therefore, is the friendship betwixt us.”

“Then must we trust to ourselves only,” returned Michael. “Thou knowest that Cyrus designeth a great stroke; and that speedily. Should it fall within few days, all may end well; if we can but obtain delay for such time. Should we fail to secure promise of that, the remedy to be *then* sought, must be anything whatsoever that thought can conceive, and hand execute; though death follow, like thunder on the bolt. I tell thee, in thine ear, Araspes; that, sooner than those pearls of Israel shall be devoured by that hog, this hand shall strike his head from his shoulders, even in broad daylight, and in the presence of his whole court, and army. By the aid of God, I will, with the sword of Samson, do, at the least, that which *he* did with but an ass’s jaw-bone! I *feel*, Araspes, I *feel* that, in my mail of proof, and God sending me forth, I can go through the guard of Belshazzar, as through the stalks of a corn-field; and surely it cannot *now* be a demon that stirreth me on! Rouse thyself then, my friend; and frame thou speech, with which to move the despot to grant delay.”

“I know not,” returned the Lydian, musingly, “how to frame excuse for desiring instant audience of the king.”

“That excuse, then, can I give thee,” eagerly interrupted Michael; “for I bear to thee a message

from Croesus ; to be spoken by thee privily in the ear of Belshazzar."

"What message?" asked Araspes, and now with firmer tone and look,—for the great spirit of Michael went perforce to his soul; as the heat from a great fire would have penetrated his flesh.

"As thou didst enter this house," he continued, "was I in the act to leave it; and ride forth to the Persian camp; for somewhat coldly, methinks, hath the king of late looked on me; as though wroth that already hath not come from Croesus that word which, I need not tell thee, will never be spoken. Thy message, therefore, is most timely. Speak it then at once."

"The words are these," said Michael; "Let Araspes come on the morrow to Croesus; and he shall hear, touching a weighty matter."

"Methinks that soundeth the right string,"—said Araspes, faintly smiling—"It may excite expectation of some great thing to be done; and thus win for us that delay which, thou sayst, will be victory. But thou, Michael; as the bearer of the words, mayst be called for; and must be at hand. He will doubtless desire to question thee, as to the state of the Persian camp."

"To that end purposed I to accompany thee in thy chariot," said Michael. "Give me a gay cloak, to fling over my plain raiment; and thou need not feel shame for thy companion."

Araspes looked at the simple, unembroidered dress; then snatched up a rich cloak; and put it



into the hand of his friend. "I saw nought but thyself, Michael," he replied. "Yet it may be prudent to guard against drawing upon us the eyes of men about the court. And now—consider well what thou wilt say, if the king call thee before him. But, as thou wouldst hope to prosper, note thou this. Let not thy tongue utter word which may show thee to him as once the soldier of Cyrus; else, will he refuse thy prayer; and, mayhap, even send thee to death. Sure is he to demand, how came it that Croesus sent message like this through thee; and what matter it was that led thee to visit the enemy's camp. But into these things will he, doubtless, enquire of me, privately, before thou be called for; and thus shall I answer. 'The young Israelite, O king, fought at Thymbra; and greatly was he distinguished there by Croesus, for his valor, and for his gentleness after the fight. One of the lords of Babylon, O king, seized his father; and cast him into prison; and demanded a heavy ransom. To procure this, the young Israelite journeyed to Jerusalem; and, in returning through the Persian camp, was seen, and remembered by Croesus; and bidden to bring to me this message.' Such shall be my reply to the demand of the king. Haply, after this, he may not question thee at all: but, if he do, such must be thy reply also; for it is the truth."

"Have thou no fear," replied Michael; "our God will direct and sustain me. Hark! I hear the wheels of thy chariot."

## CHAPTER XIII.

WITH downcast eyes, and faces closely hooded ; seeing not, and thinking not of the splendors through which they passed, the beauteous daughters of Zillah, the pearls of Israel, were borne in silence, and not without tokens of respect, to an inner chamber of the Regal Palace ; there to await the summons of the despot.

“ Our royal master sleepeth yet,” said at length Zebul, the black eunuch, to whose charge they had been surrendered by the officer : “ but in good time, damsels, will ye be honored by admission to his presence.”

“ We desire no such honor,” replied Naomi, in proud tone. “ Meantime, while compelled to wait here, is there no one of our own sex, to whose care we may be left ? The daughters of Israel are not accustomed to the converse of strange men.”

“ Thou speakest loftily,” returned Zebul ; “ and the better will the king, therefore, delight in thee ; for he loveth the high spirit in woman ; forasmuch as it pleaseth him to bring it low. Yet, let me whisper thee, be not too high ; lest love turn to wrath ; and thy body suffer.”

Ruth shuddered ; and laid her hand on the arm of her sister, looking at her the while ; and mutely thus cautioning her to mildness of words. Zebul caught a glance of her exquisite beauty, as she looked up, and added, as if communicating that which could not fail to bring happiness to her ; "As for thee, maiden, sure am I that thou wilt find favor with the king, and be honored by his great love ; even perchance before the choicest of his concubines."

"Cease thy ribald talk," exclaimed Naomi : "and leave us, at least, in silence ; if we may not be left in privacy. Thy speech, and thy presence, are both offensive."

"I have no desire to thrust my presence upon such delicate damsels," retorted Zebul, with a dark scowl : "but, perhaps, the company of our women might not much better please you : for the concubines are not likely to look with great pleasure on such as ye. If it please you, however, I will have it made known unto them that ye desire . . ."

"Be silent, man !" cried Naomi : "we crave not such company ; nor any other which thou art likely to offer : but let us, at least, remain in peace."

She was yet speaking, when the door slowly opened ; and a tall figure, richly yet simply attired, came in. Zebul sank at once upon his knees ; touched his forehead on the floor ; and remained, till he should hear the command to arise. The form was that of a woman, far advanced in years ; yet erect, graceful, and dignified. The pallid,

time-worn, and sorrow-marked, yet still beautiful face ; the yet clear-speaking eye ; the lips, grave almost to severity, yet placid, and benevolent ; the look, expressing consciousness of power, and highest rank ; the movement of every limb, denoting the grace and grandeur of the spirit that ruled them,—all told to the hapless damsels,—for they felt that but one such could be in Babylon,—that the illustrious Nitocris ; the great, and revered mother of the mean and detested tyrant, Belshazzar, was before them. By one impulse, both went hurriedly towards her, and dropped on the knee.

“ Queen,—for such we feel thou art,”—cried Naomi, with impassioned voice, “ have pity upon us ; and deliver us from a misery more bitter than death ! ”

“ We would be alone,” said Nitocris. Zebul, though he presumed not to look up, knew to whom the words were addressed ; arose ; and, with repeated bendings, left the chamber.

“ Ye are daughters of Israel,” began the queen, as she seated herself on a couch ;—“ I saw you brought hither ; and am come to speak unto you. Arise ; and sit beside me. Yet, first, throw back your hoods, that I may look upon your faces. Ha ! I need not ask, now, wherefore you are here : but, before you sit, answer me this,—though, of a truth, the question is unneeded :—come ye hither of your own free will ; and knowing to what end,—or are ye brought by a command which cannot be disobeyed ? ”

"We have been forced from our home, gracious queen," exclaimed Naomi. "Our father was this morning seized, by order of Sarsechim, and carried to prison; we were seized also, and, under terror of a royal officer, and four armed men, were compelled to come hither: and alas! alas! too surely know we for what accursed purpose! Save us, O gracious queen, save us! We are pure maidens of Israel! I am betrothed to one of the best and noblest of our people: my sister is desired in marriage by a young lord of the city. We have little dower for our husbands, save spotless innocence, and boundless love. Yet are we granddaughters of a king,—of Zedekiah, once king of Jerusalem. Put forth thy power, noble queen; give us our liberty: and morn and eve, while life and speech remain, will we pray to our God for his blessings upon thee!"

Nitocris took her by the arm; raised; tenderly kissed her on both cheeks, and placed her at her right side. She then took the hand of Ruth; pressed her, as she had been her own child, to her bosom; kissed her lovingly, and placed her at her left. A short silence followed; the heart of Ruth beating, till the strokes could scarcely have been counted;—the marble face, and almost lightning eye of Naomi, fixed on the queen; as though hoping that, in the first word, she might hear the irons drop from her spirit. But Nitocris sighed heavily, and remained silent. Naomi saw that her power was not equal to her will: that there was a

might in Babylon greater than of her who, more than any other ruler, since its original builder, had strengthened, and adorned it. Still did the high-souled maiden hope that,—if not the full light, yet some cheering rays, might shine on their darkness, through this most blessed uprising; that the horror which approached, might at least be kept back for a time: and, if but for a week, then, perhaps, for a month; perhaps for a year: haply for ever! Again and again Nitocris looked in their anxious faces, and sighed deeply.

Naomi once more sank on her knee before the queen; seized her hand, and said, “In mercy speak to us! in pity give us aid! Thy noble heart, O queen, is for us: I see, I feel that it is! Were the event to rest on thy command, we should this instant go free. A less holy will than thine o’errules thee! But, gracious queen, the will of God, which speaketh to thee in thy heart, and which createth therein *thy* will, ought to be obeyed, rather than the will of man, whose understanding is dark, and whose desires are corrupt. Obey the right, noble lady! resist the wrong. Though ill may befall thee from man, yet will that evil be but for a moment: if the rebuke of God visit thee, it may lie on thee for ever! A slight fault, perhaps, to disobey the known will of the king; but a heavy sin, to disregard the voice of God! Let us go forth, then, before the king riseth from his bed. He hath not seen us; and cannot heed for us. We will fly from the city; and come never back, unless

thou will it; and thy hand can boldly protect us. Oh, gracious queen! have pity; and speak to us."

"Arise, my child, and sit," said Nitocris, drawing her again to her side. "All that thou hast said, my own heart hath said also. Far as my power can go, be ye sure that I will aid you: for not your beauty alone, nor your innocence, nor your wretchedness, moveth me to shield you from wrong; but, my daughters, because I have at last known, that the God whom your people worship, is the one only God! and that, in serving you, I should do a thing well pleasing in His sight!"

Ceremony was forgotten. At those words, and at the benignant and pious look with which they were uttered, at once the sisters flung their arms around the neck of the queen, and kissed her with a loving daughter's kiss. In the next moment came a recollection, that the stately forms of court had been violated. They withdrew their arms; and remained silent, and abashed. But the noble countenance,—beautiful with the soul-beams that issued from it,—smiled on them; and they were calmed.

"Yes, my children," she pursued; "the thoughts that were awakened in me, years back, by that great, but long unhappy king, Nebuchadnezzar,—after his reason had returned to him, and he had proclaimed to the nations, that the God of Israel is the only true God,—those thoughts, at length, after the sleep of many years, have again arisen within me; and have now, I feel, taken root in my heart

for ever ! I had long resisted them. Often, when your great prophet Daniel would have spoken the words of truth to me, did I refuse to hear ; and, to my sorrow now, he opened not his mouth, against my will, to bring light upon my darkness. My chief magistrate, my first minister was he, during many years ; for his understanding was clear as the day ; his rule was righteous ; his justice was seen by all : but, for my priest, I would not acknowledge him. Before the eyes of men, I *must* not, even now, so avow him,—lest greater evil far it should bring upon your people : for the king seemeth mad against them ; and would, I fear, slay them all, as wolves are slain by the shepherd. But, privily, ere many days have passed, will I go unto Daniel ; and will take counsel with him, how the best to serve your people. Yet, my daughters, rely not too much on my power, even while ye know, of a truth, that my whole heart desireth to help you. The king, my son, listeneth not now, as of yore, to the counsels of his mother : and, if he promiseth, too oft he performeth not. There is, alas ! for him, but one law ; and that law is, the desire of his own heart ; the desire of the living moment. That which he craveth, *must then*, and *there* be done ; even though he know that gods forbid, and demons urge him on. If a mountain stand in his way, the mountain must be removed,—for the king will not be turned out of his course. Were he, in his madness, to demand the sun, for the lamp of his feasting hall, he would rave, if they reared



not tower upon tower, to bring it down. See ye not, my children, how difficult the task to deal with such? From me would he endure more, far more, I believe, than from any other living creature; but, almost daily, have I been taught to fear, that there may be a point, invisible to me, beyond which to tread, would be to fall down a precipice. Haply I may, by soft words, and gentle counsel, persuade him to deal less hastily with you: to delay, at least, if he cannot at once resign, his purpose: and, after delay, perhaps may follow total abandonment: the mad fever kept down for a time, a cure may be wrought. But," addressing Naomi, "if, as thou, my child, dost desire, I should, in defiance of my son, set you at liberty, He who knoweth all things, can alone know what would follow. Belshazzar giveth to me ever that outward show of respect, and obedience, due from a son to a mother: but he hath, in his nature, nought in common with mine. —A mystery, a deep mystery is it! My son he is, in the flesh,—unless, as *may* be, some dark villany hath been practised; and a strange infant hath been put in place of my own,—in the flesh, he is, or, seemeth to be, my son; but, in the spirit, darkness and light are not more opposed than we. I tell you, my children," she proceeded in whisper,—“but for your own ears alone,—that, were I thus to defy his headstrong will; and to come before him in the moment of his madness; the son's dagger would, too probably, be plunged into the mother's heart!”

She shuddered, as she spake the words ; and, for a short time, all remained silent.

"Confiding in thy goodness, great queen," said Naomi, at length, "we must abide the event. Yet, rather far would we perish, than yield ourselves to the great wickedness that is threatened us."

"Preserve us ! Oh preserve us !" said Ruth, at last, mastering her fear : "if not openly, yet by some means, oh save us from worse than death !"

"My child !" exclaimed Nitocris, embracing her, "thy voice is sweeter than the nightingale's, yet stronger than a trumpet, to stir the heart ! Take comfort. Endure for a time, as ye may : and be sure that I will strive for you, even to the gate of death !"

She took from her finger a ring. "When the king speaketh unto you,—for, till he see you, word of mine would be vain,—move him, as you can, to have mercy ; and to let you depart to your own house : but, if he refuse you, then shew to him this : and say that you had it as a token from his mother, that ye have found favor with her ; and that she desireth him to let you become her hand-maidens. If all fail,—something,—though I see not as yet what,—shall be done ; for, as I live, come what may, I will stand betwixt you and this evil !"

She put upon the trembling finger of Ruth the refulgent ring : embraced, and kissed them both ; then arose. "May our God bless, and support, and deliver you, beloved daughters !" she said, laying her hands upon their bowed heads : with moistened

eyes looked tenderly upon them ; and moved slowly and sorrowfully towards the door. "I will give order that ye be left in privacy," she added, turning round ; "and ye need not, then, fear intrusion. Ye will see me again."

Naomi and Ruth had followed her. They sank on the knee before her ; called on God to bless her ; and, half in tears, half in shadowy hope, saw her depart.

When she was gone, they stood and looked anxiously each into the face of the other ; but said nothing. Ruth, at length, threw her arms round her sister's neck ; leaned her head upon her bosom ; and burst again into a flood of tears.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE chariot of Araspes, drawn by two swift horses, ranked abreast, whirled rapidly towards the palace of the king. Not a word was spoken; for the driver sat beside his master; and speech would have been overheard. Like a flickering fire, was the heart of Araspes,—flashes of flame, and bursts of thick smoke; as alternate hope, and fear agitated him. But, as a volcano, charged to the mouth; yet, for the time, lying in a grim repose, was the soul of Michael. Through the gates of the three massive walls which surrounded the vast edifice; making of it thus, at once a palace and a strong fortress; they passed unquestioned; alighted at length; rapidly ascended the steps that led up to the great terrace; and soon stood before the portal of the southern entrance. To Araspes, well known as a lord of the city, and as one who had been honored by private speech with the king, admission was readily granted; and at once they entered.

On a disengaged mind, the magnificence of the spectacle, for the first time beheld, might have been overwhelming; but on Michael, whose whole

soul was absorbed in thought of the beloved daughters of Zillah, and the degradation with which they were threatened, the gorgeous scene, though beheld by the sense, was scantily noted by the mind. There passed across his eyes a dream-like vision of vast halls ; great portals, guarded by colossal bulls, and lions,—some of them having wings, like a bird ; and some, heads like those of men. On the walls were paintings, in dazzling colors ; representing, as it seemed, battles, sieges of cities, triumphant processions, and religious ceremonies. There appeared, also, tall slabs of alabaster, covered with inscriptions ; and others, on which were carved the figures of kings, and priests, and strange human forms, headed like eagles. To either hand, as they went on, still did he behold great doorways, guarded like the first, by huge lions, or bulls, of alabaster ; and, before them, other doorways, similarly guarded, all leading into other halls of the gigantic edifice. Glancing at the ceilings, he saw that they also were gorgeously painted, with figures of animals ; or, here and there, with flowers of richest hues : and that the beams above seemed of gold. A great flaming of gold was on the walls also ; mingled with the bright colors of the paintings, and the sculptures. All the splendor flashed upon him, and was gone ; or unthought of : for, before the eyes of his soul, were the pale, fear-stricken faces of the hapless daughters of Israel.

They stopped at length ; and Araspes addressed

himself to one whom, by his richly embroidered tunic, necklace, ear-rings, bracelets, and armlets of gold, Michael conjectured to be some youthful lord of the court; but who was, in fact, only one of the eunuchs in immediate attendance on the king.

"Our royal master," said he, in reply to the enquiry of Araspes, "hath but now seated himself at the morning meal; nor, for an hour or more, will he abide interruption. Will my lord, and his friend, take their amusement in the halls, till the time shall come?"

"Knowest thou, Shallum," said Araspes, "if two maidens have been brought hither this day?"

"Yea, have there," was the reply; "two damsels, as I hear, brighter than morning; and lovelier than flowers after rain, when the sun shineth."

"Come they as handmaidens unto the queen?" said Araspes, trembling with anxiety.

"Rather, I hear, as chamber-fellows unto the king," replied Shallum; "and well worthy, in truth, are they said to be of such honor."

"Are they at hand?" asked the young Lydian, more and more agitated; yet assuming, well as he could, the tone and air of calmness; "they are well known to us; and, if permitted, glad should we be to pass the time in their presence, till the king shall give us admittance."

Shallum smiled, and shook his head. "No women, set aside for the pleasure of the king," he

replied, "are ever allowed admission here. They are in the north-eastern chambers; and it might cost thee thy life, my lord, shouldst thou attempt to get speech with them."

"Here, then, will I await the king's leisure;" said Araspes: "for, in truth, of entertainment great store is there on these walls; and long days, instead of hours only, might pleasantly be passed before them. When thy royal master, Shallum, can give ear to me, in this hall shall the messenger find me."

The eunuch bowed low, and departed.

"I gave promise to our revered Zillah," said Michael, in low voice, as soon as they were alone, "that I would seek to have counsel with our great prophet, Daniel. While thou attendest the summons of Belshazzar, will I hasten to him; and will return, ere thou can require my presence."

"Where, then, dwelleth he?" enquired Araspes.

"Even there where first he was placed by the queen Nitocris, after she had builded this great palace; and while he was yet her chief minister, and ruler over the city;—within the chambers of the tower toward the south west,—there dwelleth he still."

"Hating thy people as he doth, marvel is it to me," said Araspes, "that the king hath not driven thence the chief man among you."

"He may hate, but more he feareth our holy seer," returned Michael; "for he hath not forgotten his prophecy against a mightier king than

he ; and the fulfilment thereof : nor, without bringing shame on himself, could he displace the man, to whom the queen had therein appointed his abode. But I can talk, nor think of aught, save our great work. If, before I return, thou, Araspes, shouldst stand before the king, let not thy voice pray for *mercy*,—but plead for justice ; to the daughters of a king ; to thyself, the nephew of a king ; and to me, the descendant of a mighty man, and a ruler in Israel.”

“ I will go with thee, and speak to the keepers of the doors,” said Araspes, “ else, perchance, they may obstruct thee. But fail thou not, on thy return, to await in this hall the summons that may call thee before the king.”

Without farther word, they then went forth together ; nor did Araspes quit his friend, till they had reached the south-western tower, and had heard that the prophet was within. And well was it for Michael, and for others, when, a short time afterwards, he again went forth, and alone, that he had been noted by the soldiers on guard, as the friend of a lord whom the king honored.

In the vicinity of the south-western tower, all was silence and solitude : for, of the numerous, highly favored, well-fed, and well-paid soldiery that guarded the palace, none were near : and the foot of stranger rarely came thither. To the solemn servitor who had opened the door, and informed him that the prophet was within, the young Israelite said ; “ Say thou to the holy Daniel, that



Michael, the son of Adad, of the tribe of Dan, craveth admittance, that he may speak unto him, touching a great matter."

"Come thou in, son of Adad," was the reply; "and thy desire shall be made known unto him."

Never had Michael held private commune with the great man of Israel; though often had he beheld him, during the most solemn ceremonies of their religion; and, on lighter occasion, profound would have been the diffidence, and even awe, that would have come over him, at thought of standing in such presence: but, as even the brightest of earthly lamps is obscured when the sun shines forth, so, in the great turmoil of his soul, as he thought of the peril of Naomi and Ruth, that which might have bowed him with reverential fear, rather lifted him with pious hope. Not without impatience did he wait the return of the servitor: and, when, at length, a venerable priest appeared in his stead, the reply which was brought, at once disappointed, astonished, and elevated him.

"To Michael, the son of Adad, thus saith Daniel; 'I render worship at this hour unto the God of Israel; and may not speak unto thee. But, gird up thy loins, Michael, servant of the Most High; and do diligently that which the Lord shall say unto thy soul. And be thou of good cheer; for the hour draweth nigh; the hand of the Lord God of Israel is stretched forth over this wicked city; and the signs thereof shall be seen in the heavens. Hell also knoweth that her doom hath been spoken; and

the things of darkness are abroad. But, for the damsels of Israel, fear thou not, Michael. An angel of the Lord watcheth over them; and they shall pass through abomination, with garments white as snow. Do thou thy work well; even as Cyrus, the appointed one, hath desired of thee: and put all thy trust in God.'"

Overwhelmed with wonder, and elevated with hope; and joy, Michael could answer not a word; but sank upon his knees, and worshipped. He arose at length; and saw that he was alone.

Slow was his pace as he returned; for astonishment at the words of Daniel; confidence in their supernal origin, and in the fulfilment of their promise, so wholly absorbed him, that he walked as one in a dream.

Araspes, meantime, had been summoned to the presence of the king.

"Thou art early, young Lydian," said Belshazzar: "and I like not disturbance so soon after meat; but thou hast, doubtless, matter of weight for mine ear; and I therefore permit thy approach. Get ye hence all," he said to the servitors,— "except thee, Ashkenaz: and keep thou at distance; for I have private discourse with this young lord."

All the servitors, save the favorite black eunuch, vanished noiselessly; and to the lower end of the vast hall went he; where no word, unless uttered with a loud voice, could reach the keenest ear.

"Draw nigher," said then the king; "and let

me hear thy tidings. Somewhat late, in truth, do they come; but they make amends, I hope, for their tardiness, by their value."

"Let not the king be displeased," replied Araspes, in low tone, "when I say that, as yet, I have *no* tidings; but a token only that tidings may, ere-long, be forthcoming. A message hath this morning reached me from Croesus; and the words thereof are these! 'Let Araspes come on the morrow to Croesus; and he shall hear, touching a weighty matter.' Knowing, O king, that this matter could affect thee alone, I hastened hither, to learn thy pleasure thereon, ere I shall depart."

"My pleasure is known to both of you already:" said the king, slightly frowning: "and well did I hope, thy coming hither was to announce that it would be done. Hast thou aught else to say, young lord?" he proceeded, when he saw that Araspes stood silent, and hesitating.

"Oh! my lord the king," exclaimed the agitated youth, sinking on one knee: "I have, indeed, another thing to say; a boon to beg: a favor to implore; nay, an act of justice to ask of thee: easy for thee to grant; and, to me, more precious than my own life!"

"Speak out, and at once," said the king: "I grant neither favor nor justice, blindfold."

"Let not the king be angered, when his servant speaketh of justice due to him," said Araspes, tremblingly; "for, what wrong can be greater, than to take from a man that which is even as a part of

himself; the better part of all for which he careth to live! During five years, O king, have I sought in marriage a damsel of this city; and soon did I hope to put on her finger the marriage ring. Her sister is betrothed to my friend; even to him from whom I this day received the words of Croesus...."

"And they have forsaken both of you, I suppose, for other men," interrupted the king. "A not uncommon freak; but I see not wherefore I should be troubled for such matter."

"Not so, my royal master," replied Araspes: "closely as ever are their souls bound to us; and ours to them; and death were better far than severance from each other. No, king of Assyria; they have been forcibly taken from their home; and, as we fear, for the pleasure of one far greater than we. And yet, that greater one knoweth them not; nor hath ever beheld them: and, surely, a lighter thing will it be for him, even though he be the mightiest upon earth, to forego an enjoyment with those who are strange to him, than for two humble men, to whom they are the very life of their life, to lose them for ever!"

"Again I say to thee, speak out; and plainly," cried the king, with a dark frown. "Who are these damsels; and who is the man of whom thou speakest? I make no promise or award, in the dark."

"Forgive me, O king!" exclaimed the young Lydian. "Take thought, I pray thee, that I, and my friend, though thy subjects, are men also; and

have feelings and passions, even as thyself: and, if thou hast ever known what it is to love a woman more than thine own life, remember it then, O king, when thou comest to judge betwixt us; and so deal unto us, as thou wouldst be dealt unto."

"For the last time, I command thee to speak at once to the matter," said Belshazzar, in harsh tone: "at once, I say, or get thee hence."

"The damsels, O king," said Araspes, in low, trembling tone, "are the grand-daughters of Zedekiah, once king of Israel. They were this day seized, by order of Sarsechim, thy chief minister; and have been brought to the royal palace."

The swollen, blood-shot eyes of Belshazzar glared with mingled astonishment, and anger, as, with rough voice, he exclaimed; "And dardest thou stand against the will of the king? He hath heard of them; and hath desired them; and hath commanded them to come before him. His are they now,—not yours: and wherefore should ye presume to question his right to do with them according to his pleasure!"

"Let my lord the king have patience with his servant," said Araspes; "and forgive him if overboldly he speaketh. But, though all which a man hath, in gold, and all manner of possessions, may justly be claimed for the king, if he hath need of them; yet, never hath it been held, that any power of earth can lawfully take from a man the woman to whom he is wedded."

"Thou fool!" cried the monarch, "which,

thinkest thou, doth stand highest in Babylon,—the law, or the king? There is no law here,—there never shall be law, save my will. But, even if such law as thou pratest of *were* here; and my will opposed it not,—what the better were ye for it: ye are not wedded to the women; and they are free to leave you for other men. And dost think, young folly, that, if the king look with eye of favor upon them, they will rather be your wives, than his concubines?"

"Will the king graciously leave it to themselves to choose?" said Araspes, timidly. "An eagle is indeed the king of birds; but it may be, that a dove would rather be mated with a dove, than with the eagle."

"By Baal, no!" cried Belshazzar: "the king will hold the power of choice to himself. The dove, as thou sayst, may not like to mate herself with an eagle; yet the eagle may like to ruffle the dove."

"But," pleaded Araspes, in persuasive tone, "the king will not be, to these innocent daughters of him who also was a king, as a cruel eagle to a feeble dove. If the damsels are not yet our wives, yet are they dear to us both, as the wife most beloved upon earth."

"By Baal, and dearer threefold, I doubt not;" exclaimed the king, with a coarse laugh. "But that which is not yet his own, no man can claim: and the king may justly demand it."

"May I, without offence, whisper it to thee, O king," proceeded Araspes, after a brief pause;

"that such favor to his nephew, may much move Croesus to do even more than he may have designed?"

"Ha—thou speakest now, indeed, to the purpose," said the king, his brow clearing. "If thou hast power to move Croesus, the quicker and the better to work for me, thou hast claim far weightier than thy foolish plea for justice: and it shall have consideration. Tell me, then,—if I consent to give up to thee the damsel of thy choice . . ."

"Pardon, O king," said Araspes, gently interrupting: "I plead not for the release of the one, more than of the other. If the king condescend to speak of contract and conditions with his servant, the two damsels must count as one only."

"A curse upon the damsels!" cried the king: "and the spirit of evil grasp them! Let them go to the place of darkness, for aught I heed,—so that I get somewhat of worth in their stead! Tell me then, young Lydian,—if I promise to set free these women, what service wilt thou do me with Croesus?"

"Whatsoever service it may please the king to require of me, that will I attempt;" was the reply. "But, meantime, will it not be his gracious pleasure to release the damsels at once? Much time may be consumed, before the opportunity for action may occur; even though the desire of Croesus to serve the king be, to the height, ardent; and, to those timid maidens, every minute of such bondage is worse than an hour of common suffering."

"Persuade thou Croesus to give his royal promise that he will do battle for me, when next I issue from the gates," said the monarch; "and I swear to thee, by Baal, and by all other gods, that the women shall go free, and untouched. If thou fail to get from him this promise, the damsels shall come to my couch, sure as the sun shall arise in the east. But bring me that promise, and confirmed in writing, — and the women shall be yielded; and five talents in gold beside, shall be given to thyself. Ask me no farther; for it will be idle talk. The damsels must remain here, — were it but to spur thee on to work more diligently: but, as I am a king, I will not put hand upon them till thou return. Get thee away, therefore; that the quicker thou mayst come back; and the sooner may they be released."

"The king's pleasure shall be done," said Araspes, bowing to the floor: then arose; and was departing, when the king recalled him.

"Who is this friend of thine, by whom Croesus sent message to thee?" he demanded; "and how came it that he had speech with him?"

"The young man is Michael, the son of Adad, one of the race of Israel; and descended from a mighty man, who was a ruler over that people," was the reply. "One of thy lords, O king, cast his aged father, Adad, into prison; and demanded, for his ransom, a sum greater than his children could pay. Hoping to obtain help, Michael journeyed even to Jerusalem; and but this morning



## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Michael was ushered into the regal hall, the dreaded despot had resumed his couch ; and, busied in confused thoughts, desires, and hopes, saw not, for a time, that a noble figure had bowed ; and now stood before him, awaiting his pleasure. The left foot of the king, clad in a sandal whose bands seemed of beaten gold, was stretched upon the couch. Half sitting, half reclining, his right elbow rested upon a silken pillow, thick with embroidery ; his cheek leaned on his hand. On his head was a tiara, bound with a band of gold, and studded with jewels, as the heaven with stars.

Without a throb of the heart ; without the slightest touch of awe, Michael stood, with calm clear eye, looking upon the man, and the pomp before him. So might a benignant Jupiter have gazed upon a satyr. He beheld a corpulent form, of middle height ; clad in garments that blazed with jewels, and gold : a face, sallow, flabby, and fat ; the thick, purple lips of which moved rapidly, as if mutely giving form to the words of his thoughts ; while the high-arched nostril of the broad fleshy nose, expanded, and shut like that of

fourth, if thou return not, then dieth my promise; for then must die all hope of thy success with Cræsus. Bid thy friend Michael appear before me."

Bowing once more to the ground; and again as he passed out at the door; Araspes departed: and Belshazzar, swallowing a draught of wine, arose to pace the hall; and to balance in his mind the pleasure that he had promised to forego, against the momentous good that he might thereby obtain.

With rapid foot, the young Lydian returned to Michael, and whispered; "He hath pledged his royal word to leave them untouched during three days. I go now with a message to Cræsus; but thou must appear instantly before the king. The gods be with thee!"

"Not for three days only, but for ever, shall they be safe from the destroyer," said Michael, with proud confidence; "for so, by the mouth of holy Daniel, hath it been spoken."

"All gods grant that he speak truly!" ejaculated Araspes, pressing the hand of Michael: then, beckoning the same eunuch to whom he had before spoken, said; "thy royal master hath commanded that this my friend appear before him instantly. Conduct thou him to the presence."

used to talk of; Samson, methinks his name was. But I will try thee again." He gave a sign, and the black eunuch hastened towards him. "Fetch me hither the bow and arrows of that Bactrian giant, Samgarnebo," he said; and the black disappeared. "Now, young Israelite; since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, never hath there been man in Babylon, that could string the bow of that giant,—though thousands have essayed the task; and great hath been the reward offered to him that should do it. String thou the bow; and draw the arrow to the head; and send it true to a fair mark; and, by Baal, thou shalt have the sword of Arphaxad, the king of Susia; with handle of gold, and jewels, worth the revenue of a goodly province. Bare me thine arm, young Israelite; that I may see the sinews thereof."

Reluctantly,—yet not liking, for small thing, to rouse the ill temper of one, in whose power were still the daughters of Zillah, Michael drew up the sleeve of his tunic.

"Why, man!" cried the despot, "'tis the knotted limb of an oak, not an arm: and I fear the sword is thine. But here cometh the bow of the giant: and, now, bend it, if thou canst."

The huge bow was put into the hand of Michael; and the eunuch who had brought it, stood behind him, holding the quiver, and decorously smiling. Michael placed his knee against the bow; and the thick sinew was instantly on the notch,—the invincible weapon was strung. A coarse, loud

laugh, expressive of mingled pleasure, disappointment, and astonishment, burst from the tyrant.

"Thou hast done it, so far, Jew,"—he said; "but now, take forth an arrow; and let me see thee strike a mark. Stay,—fling me open the door that leadeth to the banquetting hall, Ashkenaz; and bid some of thy fellows bring up a slave; and set him up at the farther end thereof."

The eunuch disappeared: and the king sat silent a while, gazing in wonder at the bended bow, and the man.

"Canst thou hit fair mark at three hundred paces, Jew?" demanded he, at length, when, having risen, he saw that, at the very extremity of the feasting hall, an aged slave had been placed, as target; and now stood, unconsciously waiting the trial of skill.

"Be the arrow true, and the bow quick in the spring, perchance I may," said Michael.

"Then pick thee an arrow to thy choice," rejoined the tyrant: "and pierce me the breast of yonder slave; and the sword is thine."

"Will the king pardon me," said Michael, laying down the quiver, which had just been put into his hand: "it is forbidden by our law to take the life of man: at any other mark, gladly will I do his pleasure."

"Thou dolt!" exclaimed the despot, astounded and wrathful that his will should not be instantly obeyed: "what is thy law to me? and what matters the life of such a thing as that yonder?"

Thou wouldst kill a sheep, or an ox, for thy own food; and think it no sin; what sin, then, can there be to take the life of a slave, when for the pleasure of the king it is done?"

"I dare not do such thing, though for the pleasure of all the kings of the East," replied Michael, calmly; but with an almost severe solemnity.

"Thou art not what I took thee for, I fear," said the despot. "When, till now, was it called unlawful to kill a slave! and when was it heard before, that any man dared to gainsay the will of the king! But I waste no word on such as thou. Drive away the old slave, some of you; and let him be well scourged: and set me up, in his place, another mark, as fair. Doth thy law forbid thee, Jew, to strike a wooden god of Ind?"

"I will smite him, if I can, and freely," replied Michael, smiling.

"Get thee gone, then, Ashkenaz," cried the king; "and bid that they set me up the gilded idol of Ind, brought hither by Nergalsharezer: and, if thou canst strike him on the breast, the sword of Arphaxad shall be thine, as it would have been hadst thou smitten the slave: and, farthermore, though thou deservest not such favor, the king will forgive thee. Choose well thine arrow, therefore; for I would know if thy cunning doth match thy strength."

Michael took from the quiver shaft after shaft; ut still, by a slight shake of the head, as he laid

them down, intimated that they pleased him not. At length, he put one apart from the rest: and resumed his scrutiny of the remainder. Of these, two more were set apart; and, then, commenced the more nice examination, and comparison of the three. One of them, at length, was fixed on, and fitted to the thick sinew which formed the string. Standing then as in act to shoot, with seeming ease he drew the arrow to the head; slackened, and drew again, and again, as if to accustom his hand to the size and tension of the weapon: and finally, lowering the bow, remained calmly awaiting the pleasure of the king.

Staring in silent wonder, stood Belshazzar, as he watched every motion: till at length, beholding the strength-defiant bow drawn till the arrow's barb touched upon its arch, he cried out, striking upon his thigh, "By Baal! thou hast magic in thine arm, young Israelite! Half Babylon would I give, to have the might thou hast! Bring me hither the sword of Arphaxad, one of you," he cried to his eunuchs; "and also five score shekels of silver in a bag. And now, Michael—such is thy name, is it not?"

"Michael, the son of Adad," was the reply.

"Then now, Michael, son of Adad," said the king jocosely, "let thine eye be bright, and thine arm steady; for the Indian god standeth before thee; and I would fain see thee do him reverence with thine arrow in his eye."

Michael looked; and, at the farther end of the

your vanquishing sail, saw a statue of almost half the human size: but standing prominent and more distinct, by reason of the bright gliding on beam and water. She passed the bow; threw the scull to the star and almost in the same instant let fly. There was a clang and a sound like the swift whir of a bird's wing: then from the end of the wing sail came a sharp noise, like the click of a small hammer on an anvil; and finally, the symbol of a falling substance. The glided sail had been struck, and thrown down. Lower it lay for the moment; and bade that the vanquished deity should be brought before him. "Mashine there, Ashtaroth," he continued, "and on the young Israelite the sword of Argimael—for here it cometh,—and put into his hand the bag of silver."

Winningly did the admiring cunning girl round the knee of so mighty a man the refrigent sword: nor did Michael unwillingly receive it; for a thought, rained by one momentary gleam over the tyrant's face, had flashed across his mind, that a weapon might be wanted by him yet, ere the hour should end.

"By Ashtaroth! it hath struck him in the left eye!" cried the delighted king; laughing vociferously, as he gazed upon the idol, which had now been brought, and set up before him: "the steel head, at least, is buried there; but, for the wood of the shaft, it is rent into shivers. I would that thou, young Israelite, wouldst smite the enemies

of the king, as thou hast smitten this god of Ind. But now," addressing the servitors, "get ye all hence again; and do thou, Ashkenaz, stand by the door; for I would speak privately with this young man. Come thou nigher unto me, Michael," he said, when they were alone together, and he had again seated himself on the couch: "nigher yet: for I have a great word for thine ear."

Michael approached to within two paces of the king; then, slightly bowing, awaited farther speech.

"The young lord Araspes telleth me," began the king, "that thou dost love one of the Jewish maidens, brought hither this morning, that I may look upon their beauty: is this so?"

"Even so, O king," replied Michael, fervently; and placing his right hand upon his heart. "I love them both, with a great and pure affection; but one of them only, as a man loveth the woman whom he desireth to wed."

"They are both, now, the king's,—not yours," said the monarch, impressively: "and, if he will to have his pleasure upon them, what power on earth can hinder him? . . . do not answer me on this question," he added hastily, perceiving that Michael was about to speak;—"neither thou, nor any man, can shew reason why the king should not take them to his bed, if such be his desire;—but, if he will forego his undisputed right to these maidens whom thou so lovest,—what service wilt thou render him, in payment for such



sacrifice? Now, do not deceive thyself, thinking, perchance, that the king careth not for the damsels; and will be readily satisfied by slight service: for I tell thee, young man, such hath been the report of the beauty of these maidens,—for I have not yet beheld them,—that I thirst after their charms, even as a man thirsteth for water in the desert, when he findeth the spring dried up. Not in return for light service, then, will the king so bridle his desire, rest thou assured. That which he is to pay for at such price, must be a gem equal in value: and how, thinkest thou, may a man like thee find jewel to match a king's; save in the doing of some act, that may bring greatest pleasure, or glory, or good, to the king; even though at risk of thy own life. If I surrender these damsels to your enjoyment, instead of my own, art thou, then, willing so to risk life in my service?"

"The risk, O king," replied Michael, "is not, with me, the whole, nor the chief matter. May I know what is the act required?"

"Thou shalt;" said Belshazzar: "but come thou still nigher, lest a bird of the air carry away my words. There is an enemy come against this great city; a mighty force of men of war, chariots, and horse, and foot: yet, among them all, is one man only, of whom Belshazzar need have fear. That man gone, the rest would be as sheep without a shepherd: they would scatter themselves abroad, as sands are scattered by the wind. He, therefore, who shall remove this man from my way,

will, in that act, give to me a jewel, rich as that which I forego in the enjoyment of those beauteous damsels. Yet, not thus only, will I reward him who so shall serve me. A hundred talents of gold will I give unto him; and he shall be high in the king's favor; and be made captain over ten thousand. Darest thou, young Israelite, for such reward, do a deed of peril?"

"Will the king speak more openly his purpose?" said Michael; "for as yet I see not distinctly that which is required of me."

"Thou art dull, Jew! or affectest dullness,"—rejoined the king. "In plain speech, then,—for a king needeth no dark word to cloak his thought,—the man to be removed from my path, is Cyrus. I would have thy sword in his heart: darest thou . . . ."

"Not, O king, were thy crown, and empire, to be the reward, would I do that wickedness!" exclaimed Michael. Every tone, every feature, every motion of the body, as he started, and stood proudly erect, flung upon the miscreant a lightning flash of scorn and indignation, before which he felt, for the moment, as if paralysed. "And for thee, king of Assyria," continued Michael, "if this thing should be spoken abroad, would not all nations of the earth cry shame upon thee! And who would blame the man that secretly should take *thy* life!"

The staggered tyrant recovered quickly; for his soul conceived comfort in the thought of a swift vengeance. The bold rebel should die! and that

and many such words from a rough, tall, grizzled man, for his words and actions should never speak word to the shame of Bels. Rather far, indeed, would he have delighted his revenge, by seeing him during a while, or expiring in torments; but time for speech must not be allowed him! Never must it be even whispered, that such worm had dared to insult the king! He must be trodden out suddenly, as a spark under the foot: and the *wherefore* must remain a mystery. He might, indeed, order in his guards; and bid them slay the wretch before his face: but, words that would never be forgotten among men, would first be uttered by him: and, besides, what might not that terrible strength perform, in defence of his own life! Might not even he himself, the king, be struck as by a thunder-bolt, for with no weak sword *was it that*, in his folly, he had armed him! No, — the blow must be sudden, *swifter, unthought of*; but fatal as the crush of a rock. *Meanwhile*, all sign of the storm that was gathering over him, must be concealed. The sky must shew fair, till the thunder-stone should be shot.

Michael looked steadily on the musing despot; and marked the pallid face grow purple: the veins of the forehead distend: the large eyes flame: the nostrils open and shut convulsively: the thick lips quiver like a sea-jelly. Some final outburst of maddest fury he expected to behold: and meditated how to meet it: but the threatening storm seemed to pass away. Gradually, the distorted

face changed its character; taking on a strange smile; till at length, shifting his position, like one suddenly pleased, the king laughed slightly, and began.

"Thou art indeed a good youth, my Michael! That which I spake, was but to try, that I might know thee: and well hast thou proved thyself faithful and just. In such men as thou, doth the king take pleasure; and such doth it delight him to honor. Henceforth, the soldier of the king shalt thou be: yea, a captain over his guard at the royal gate: and, moreover, so doth he admire and honor thee, that the damsel whom thou lovest, shall be rendered unto thee, without purchase. Yet, not the less, my Michael, until the fourth day must she remain here; lest her sister sorrow, and be lonely: but, on the fourth morn, when Araspes shall have returned from Cræsus, to whom I have sent him, then shall the damsels, untouched, go hence together."

"Let not the king be angry with me," said Michael, in softened tone; "but, of a truth, I cannot be thy soldier, O king: for . . . ."

"Hold thy peace, good youth," interrupted Belshazzar, affecting kindness; "and give me not answer now. On the fourth morning, come thou hither again; and the damsel, haply, may speak to thee words, that shall bend thy stubborn will; even as thine arm did bend the stubborn bow."

While thus speaking, he had made a sign,—and Ashkenaz stood before him.

"Send to me instantly," he whispered, "the Egyptian Phares, and his brethren twain."

The eunuch bowed, and rapidly departed.

"I dismiss thee now, my Michael," resumed the crafty despot, after a short silence, "for matters of state call upon me. Yet,—ere thou go hence, unstring me that bow; for, by my faith, I know not who, save thyself, could undo thy work."

In an instant the bow was unstrung; and Michael, though with somewhat short of the customary reverence, departed from the hall. Three tall Egyptian soldiers, armed from head to foot, had, meantime, entered; and now stood before the king. Pale, from suppressed rage; with fiery eyes and quivering lips, thus he whispered to them.

"Ye saw the man who but now went forth. After him;—but stealthily. Let him not see you, nor hear your footsteps. Follow, till he hath passed beyond the palace, through the gate of the third wall: draw nigh to him then, as to a friend: but, drive your daggers into him, till the hilts clash on his ribs. Speak not to him a word,—but strike. Yet, mind ye that ye take him unaware; for, if he lay but a finger upon you, by Nebo! ye shall find it as a bar of iron! Take heed then; be speedy; and, after ye have slain him, come to me again."

In haste the soldiers departed: and Belshazzar, filling another cup of wine, drank largely; and, with agitated look, and uneven step, paced the hall, awaiting their return.

But the time passed; and they came not. The

fury of a demon began to rage within him. As with an actual fire, his heart seemed to burn : and again, and again, he filled, and drained the cup. Ashkenaz at length drew nigh ; and announced to him that Sarsechim, his chief minister, had arrived, and desired to come before him.

"Let him enter," said the king ; and Sarsechim stood, and bowed before him.

"May it please the king to hear that which hath been done ?" said the pliant tool.

"Speak thou on, and briefly," replied the king ; "for I am in no mood for lengthy talk."

"The officers, O king," said the minister, "have done according to thy pleasure. Of the chief men among the Jews, have there been this day five hundred led to prison : and, in one of their temples, hath there been taken the book of their scriptures. Also have the two damsels, most beautiful of their women, been seized, and brought hither, to await thy pleasure : and of others, the next in beauty, have the officers noted twice ten ; who, when thou dost command, shall be brought before thee."

"Thou hast done well, Sarsechim," said the despot : "where is that book ?"

Dropping on one knee, the minister presented a book, formed of thin leaves of white leather ; sewn together, and covered with purple silk, richly gilded, saying, "but the writing thereof, O king, is in a character unknown ; so that not even our priests and astrologers can read therein."

With fierce eye the king stared upon the book,

as he turned leaf after leaf; then furiously cast it from him. "I will have some Jew brought hither to interpret the jargon," he said. "If he refuse, I will have his feet put into hot coals, till he read it; or till his legs shall become cinders. Take it up, Sarsechim; and place it on the table: I have no time for it now. Would that yonder insolent young Jew were here; that I might hear him expound it, with feet and hands, both, in the flame! What wouldst thou?" he demanded hastily, addressing an eunuch who kneeled at some distance, with his forehead to the floor; "Approach, and speak."

"The three Egyptian soldiers, most mighty king," said the eunuch, trembling, "whom thou didst send after the Israelite, to speak unto him, have returned; but fear to stand before thee."

"Drive them hither instantly; or their heads shall leap from their shoulders," vociferated the enraged tyrant; for he knew, then, that they had failed to execute his command.

"Is it the pleasure of the king that I retire?" said Sarsechim, humbly bowing.

"Ay,—get thee gone," replied Belshazzar. "Yet, stay. I see not why this thing should be hidden from thee. One of that scum of Israel hath this day spoken insolently, even to my face. What thinkest thou, Sarsechim, he hath dared to do? Even to demand of the king, that one of those Jewish damsels, whom thou hast sent this day unto him for his pleasure, should be delivered up to

*him*, because, forsooth, *he* desireth her! A very Nimrod in strength is he,—see,—that bow of the Bactrian giant Samgarnebo; which, during three score years, no man hath been able to bend, did he string, as it had been a child's plaything: and that chest of gold, which it requireth six of my strongest eunuchs to move with poles, did he lift up, and bring forward, easily as a woman carrieth her basket into the market. As his reward,—for at that time I knew not his insolent purpose,—had I given him the sword of Arphaxad, the Susian king: and, by my faith, when I stood alone with him,—for I had sent away all my attendants, when he craved private speech with me,—I held it not wise to tell him that, for his audacity, full surely would I put him to death. I summoned, however, three of the strongest of my guard; Egyptians of great stature, and approved valor; and bade them follow, and despatch him, according to his desert: and these are the men who have but now sent; and say they fear to come before me. Ha! here they be. Come on,"—he called furiously to the soldiers who, at a distance, had kneeled, awaiting command. "Come on, and swiftly, while your heads are yet your own. Now"—he continued, when they had approached within the customary distance,—“have ye done that which I bade you? Are your daggers red with his blood?”

At once the three men dropped upon their knees; and Phares, the elder, and chief among them, pale, trembling, and with low, unsteady voice, replied;



"Let not the anger of the king fall upon his servants; for, not through fault of theirs is it, that the man, hateful to him, hath escaped."

"Tell your tale, and briefly; and forge not excuses to lengthen it out," said Belshazzar, shooting from his glaring eyes looks that struck like arrows in their hearts. "Acts, not words, would I hear."

"We went after the man," resumed Phares, "through the southern portal; for therein had we seen him enter, with the lord Araspes; and caught sight of him, as he passed through the gate of the inner wall. On the run we pursued,—for his walk seemed rapid almost as the trot of a war-horse: and, as we passed through the first gate, we saw that he was already nigh to that of the second wall. Still, therefore, did we run; so that, as he went through the third gate, we were nigh unto him; and went forth immediately, ere the bolt had been shot. Our daggers were in our sleeves; concealed, but ready for the blow: and our tread was light as could be, at the speed with which we were compelled to move, so as to overtake him. But now, O my lord the king! let thine ear be open to believe, and thy heart merciful to pardon us,—for, in truth, a wonderful thing have we to tell! a thing so strange, that even thy servants themselves, who beheld it, can scarcely believe the wonder!"

"Get on with thy tale," said the king: "and waste not words. But, if ye yourselves, who saw, believe not, how, think you, shall others, who saw not, give ear to your marvel?"

"Whether it was that our foot-tread, though soft, reached his ear," pursued Phares,—his face growing more deadly pale, and his voice more tremulous—"or, that the heavy closing of the gate startled him; or, that the time was then come for which he had waited, I know not; but, just as we had drawn to within two paces of him, and had raised our daggers, he turned round: and, Oh my lord! we were struck motionless as stones! For, on a sudden, his stature became huge as a tower! lightning shot from his eyes; and flames burst from his nostrils; and from his mouth came thunder! No man could have stood before such terrible thing. We all shook, like leaves in a high wind: the faces of my brethren, seemed to me as those of dead men: and our tongues clave to the palate. Down at last we sank together; our eyes grew dark, and our senses fled: and, when we at length awoke, and looked around, behold he was gone!"

"Thou hast lied to me, Egyptian," exclaimed the king, after short pause. "Ye have been afraid; and have run from the Israelite: and now ye come with this false tale, to blind the eyes of the king; and save yourselves from his anger! By Baal, ye shall go to the death!"

"May thy servant speak?" said Sarsechim, in humble tone, when he beheld the monarch, with lurid face and quivering lip, about to issue the fatal command.

"Go on,—what wouldst thou?" said Belshazzar, in deep growling tone; his eyes still fixed on

the three prostrate soldiers, as those of a tiger on his prey.

"Is it not known unto the king," said the minister, in soft, insinuating tone, "how mighty is this people of Israel in all witchcraft, and unholy magic; so that they have made the sun to stand still in heaven; and have raised the dead; and have turned rivers into blood,—and done other marvels, such as no wisdom of man can do; but the powers of darkness only?—May not this Israelite, then, have called up a devil, that he might escape from the hands of thy servants?"

The cunning tyrant meditated for a moment. He greatly doubted, nay disbelieved, the marvellous tale of the soldiers; but he saw that it would give him fair pretext to seize openly upon the hated Israelite, who had at once disobeyed, and despised him; and resolved, therefore, to affect belief in it; even though he must thereby forego his vengeance on the three men who thus sought to deceive him.

"By Ashtaroth, thou hast said it," exclaimed he, then: "and by magic was it, I doubt not, that he did those feats of strength, passing the force of man! But, by Baal, and all the gods of heaven, he shall not escape from *my* hands! Send thou forth command, instantly, throughout all the quarter of the Jews; that Michael, the son of Adad, be delivered up unto the officers; for he hath wrought witchcraft, and incensed the king,—and shall die the death. And what man soever hideth him,

shall be burned alive! he, and his father, and his mother, his sons, and his daughters; and all that are of kin unto him! Send thou a thousand men to search throughout the quarter of the Jews: and let the criers make proclaim throughout the whole city, that, whoso bringeth unto thee this Michael, son of Adad, shall receive two talents of gold. Send thou also unto the magistrates, who have rule in the quarter of the Jews; and hear from them where abideth this magician; and if he have father, or mother, or brother, or sister, or child, within the city: and, if such there be, bring them hither, Sarsechim; for, with my own eyes, will I see the truth brought out of them. Now get thee hence; and do these things quickly; and, afterwards, return thou unto me."

"May the king live for ever!" said the minister, bowing to the floor: "the king's command shall be obeyed."

For a moment, the despot gazed again on the prostrate soldiers,—then made a sign; and Ashkenaz, touching Phares on the shoulder, whispered them to go. Trembling, yet joyful, they arose; and, with bowed bodies, not daring even to look toward the king, crept from the hall.

The fever was still fierce as ever in the breast of the tyrant. He had launched his poisoned arrows; but the mark had not yet been smitten; and hotly he thirsted to do some instant deed of vengeance. A thought, at length, flashed over him, and lightened his eye.

"Send thou, Ashkenaz," he said, "and bid that Zebul bring before me the two Jewish damsels, who have this day been brought to the palace. Yet stay," he cried, as the eunuch was departing; "I will myself visit them; for I like not that other eyes look upon my women. Come thou along with me."

With a fiendish smile, he drained another goblet of wine; and went forth,

## CHAPTER XVI.

IN agony of spirit had the hapless daughters of Zillah passed the time since the beneficent queen-mother had left them. In fear and hope alternating,—yet the dark dread ever preponderant,—had they thought, and spoken, of the fate that awaited them. In tears and sobs had the torment of Ruth vented itself; yet found no relief;—in a burning indignation, that fired her eye, and made her face rigid as marble, the spirit-torture of Naomi.

“She *cannot* help us!” at length cried Ruth: “there is no hope for us, if God save us not by miracle!”

“But we can, at the last, save ourselves! See, my sister,” replied Naomi, holding forth a small glittering dagger: “the tyrant’s own weapon, methinks; for the haft is of gold; and set with diamonds, priceless, almost, for their beauty. Beneath the pillow of yonder couch found I this treasure: but I give it not back till we quit this sty; or till it be plucked from my heart;—or from his, if that demon attempt his hellish purpose. Our God will pardon the deed that is forced upon us!”

Ruth looked with terror on the small weapon, bright as the eye of a snake, and deadly as its poison.

"Naomi!" she said, "thou canst not, thou darkest not, thou must not take thy own life! but, Oh that some other hand than thine would mercifully take mine, rather than I should become loathsome and abominable!"

"Let us not talk farther of taking life," said Naomi: "if it *must* be, let it be *when* it must. But I feel assured that, in his own way and time, our God will bring us forth triumphant over this evil. Let us, then, take of the food that hath been brought to us; else will our strength fail, and our spirit droop, at the time when all strength and all spirit may be needed; for action, or for endurance."

In silence then, but sparingly, and in spite of distaste, the sisters took of the food; and, when they had eaten, they walked, arm-in-arm, softly and sorrowfully discoursing; sometimes of their own heavy trial; their hopes and fears; sometimes of their beloved father; imprisoned, yet the less unhappy, because ignorant of his daughters' wrongs; sometimes of their idolized mother; lonely now; deprived at once of husband and children; and sometimes, also, of those beloved ones, whose wretchedness, they felt, would be great as their own; and whose power to help, they feared, would be as vain!

Their tender discourse was interrupted by the

flinging open of a door; and the entrance of a man, attired in flowing robes that shone with gold; adorned with armlets, and bracelets, and ear-rings of gold, flashing with costliest gems; two necklaces, of ruby, and of pearl; and a tiara, that seemed on flame with the diamond's lustre. With haughty step he came forward; deigning not salutation of any kind, till he stood directly before them. At the first glance, they knew the intruder to be the tyrant. Uttering a slight shriek, Ruth covered her face with both hands; and leaned her head upon her sister's bosom: but a look, haughty as that of the king himself, Naomi cast upon him; and stood in a stern majesty, awaiting what should follow. Thinking no more of the delicate sensitiveness of those lovely women, than a groom thinks of the feelings of a horse that he is examining and admiring, full opposite to Naomi stood the royal brute; from head to foot glowering over her charms.

"Turn thou also thy face," he said at length, touching the shoulder of Ruth, "for the king desireth to see thee."

Shuddering at the touch, and the hateful voice, Ruth turned round; her eyes downcast, her face pale, now, as a white rose, and drenched with tears; yet exquisitely beautiful still.

"Where have ye been hidden, diamonds and rubies among women!" exclaimed at length the gloating monster: "Unfit indeed are ye for aught but the crown of a king! Ye are as the rose



among flowers ; as the cedar among trees ; as gold among metals ! ”

“ We are but poor damsels of Israel,” said Ruth, trembling at her own boldness, not less than at the revolting tones of the speaker. “ Oh ! have pity upon us, and let us depart to our own home ! ”

“ Let you depart ? ” cried the monarch, with a satyr-like smile ; “ by the ever-blooming Astarte, not the jewels of ten regal crowns should bribe me to let you go ! But which of you, now, is the betrothed of the young Israelite, Michael, the son of Adad ; he who went unto Jerusalem ; for great things have I heard of him, and he hath found favor in my sight.”

“ My sister,” replied Ruth eagerly, hoping for good to her.

“ And her name ? ” said the king, with soft tone, affecting kindness.

“ Naomi,—and mine is Ruth,” again eagerly replied the unsuspecting maiden.

But with a keener eye was the meaning of the tyrant read by the elder. Taking from the finger of Ruth the jewelled ring, which had been put thereon by Nitocris, she held it forth, and said ; “ By this token, I shew to thee, O king, that we have found favor in the sight of the queen, thy mother ; and that she desireth of thee, that we should become her handmaidens.”

“ And by *these* tokens,” returned the king, taking from his finger two rings, set with superb

diamonds, "I shew to you, that ye have found favor in *my* sight, also; and that *my* handmaidens must ye be. Take them, damsels, when ye will," he added, laying the rings on a table; for he perceived that they shrank from accepting them. "Few, indeed, of my other concubines be there, on whom I would bestow gems like those."

"Thy concubines we will never be, shameful king!" cried Naomi, with stern voice, and flashing eye. "We will call upon the God of our fathers; and he will deliver us!"

"The God of your fathers?" echoed Belshazzar, derisively. "We shall know, then, who is the stronger,—your foolish god, or Baal, the mightiest of all gods!"

Naomi and Ruth shuddered; and turned away their faces.

"Who *is* your god?" pursued the king. "The god of a petty land, that my armies can cover, as a giant's hand covereth a small platter! The earth beyond it, knoweth him not: the nations, when they hear of him, make their mock at him! Ye have been bred in darkness, and ignorance; and know not the true gods. But your eyes shall be opened: ye shall see the temple where the gods, indeed, are worshipped: ye shall know the truth: and from our priests shall ye learn, that the favor of the gods is on the women who make themselves pleasing unto the king of kings. And for thee, Naomi, the betrothed of Michael, the son of Adad,—for his sake will I do thee honor even this night;

for, sure as the sun shall set, so surely shalt thou ascend the royal bed ! ”

“ And I tell thee, king,” exclaimed Naomi, with a look that expressed at once abhorrence, defiance, and determination fixed as fate, “ that, if the betrothed of Michael press that bed, as a corpse shall she thereon lie ! ”

Brutally laughed Belshazzar ; and, without farther word, quitted the chamber.

Down to the floor sank Ruth, weeping aloud : but Naomi, with firm hand, concealed in her bosom the deadly dagger ; with steady step, and look resolved, walked for a while to and fro ; then kneeled, and spake in the ear of her sister words of comfort.

## CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Belshazzar, his face radiant with malignant smiles, returned to the hall of Ashtaroth, he heard that Hadoram, the chief of the Magi, having in bonds two men of Israel, had arrived; and awaited the command to appear before him.

"Ha," exclaimed the king; "in good time cometh he: let him approach."

Bowing to the floor, the priest stood quickly before him.

"What men be these whom thou bringest in bonds?" he demanded.

"Even they of whom I last night spake unto the king," replied Hadoram; "the Jews who were heard discoursing of their prediction, that this great city, Babylon, should be overthrown. I bring not with them the men who could witness to their words; because the Jews themselves deny not that so they spake."

"Look thou in yonder book, that lieth upon the table," said Belshazzar.

The priest walked forward; and turned over the leaves.

"Canst thou read therein, priest?" demanded the monarch.

"May it please the king," replied Hadoram, humbly, "the character thereof is unknown to me."

"Nor marvel," replied Belshazzar, laughing; "for, of a truth, a great rarity is it: even the close-hidden book of the Jewish scriptures; seized this day in one of their dens of worship. But these Jews whom thou bringest, may haply read therefrom unto us. Let them come forward."

The priest made a sign to one who stood at the door; and, forthwith, two aged men, manacled on wrist and ankle, were led in, and placed before Belshazzar. Fixing on them a severe look, "What idle stuff," he said, "is this that ye have been heard to speak, touching the overthrow of Babylon, the eternal? What know ye of it? and whence have ye learned that which ye prate of?"

"We spake, O king," replied one of the Jews, with firm voice, "of that which, ten score years since, was predicted by our holy prophet Isaiah."

"Thy name, old man?" sharply interrogated the king.

"Madai, the son of Gether, am I called," was the reply.

"Well then, Madai, son of Gether," pursued Belshazzar, "what said your holy prophet,—some drunken singing man, I doubt not, who prophesied after his drink."

"Our prophet," replied the old man sternly, "prophesied after the inspiration of God; and his words are everlasting truth."

"Speak thou then his words; that we also may

learn the truth," said Belshazzar, deridingly. "But tell me first,—how know ye that these things were prophesied ten score of years since?"

"Because they have been preserved in our Scriptures during twice ten score years; even as the books themselves do testify."

"And hast thou, with thine own eyes, read, in those books, these prophecies?" demanded Belshazzar.

"I bless my God that I have," was the reply.

"Put thou yonder book into the hand of this wise man," said the king, with a mocking smile, to the Chaldean priest; "and let him read to us somewhat of this terrible prediction; which already maketh my knees to shake. Knowest thou that book, Jew?"

"I do," said the old man, starting; then lowly bowing,—but in reverence to the book itself, as, with deepest humility, and tremulous hand, he opened the leaves.

"Read me, then, the prophecy against this little city;" said the king: "that I may myself judge of its worth. But, if the words thereof be many, burthen me not with them; for weightier matter calleth me; but pick thou out the kernel; and keep for thyself the husk."

"There is herein no husk, O king," replied the Jew, solemnly, "more than there is lead in thy crown of gold."

"Answer me not; but to thy task!" cried Belshazzar, with a frown: and the aged man, holding

the treasured book upon his spread palms, in tone of pious exultation, began fluently to translate.

"The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain; exalt the voice unto them; shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles."

"Cease thy noise," cried Belshazzar angrily: "What have I to do with such trash,—your lifting of banners, and exalting of voices! I tell thee once more, give me the kernel only; keep to thyself all such husk!"

Madai paused an instant; and began again.

"The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people: a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle."

"By Nebo! the head shall be stricken from thee, if thou pester me with more of such lunatic raving!" bellowed the tyrant. "What hath this to do with Babylon; near which there is no mountain at all, for your multitudes to make noise in! Gather thy senses, and look before thou readeest; for I will have nought, save direct and plain prophecy against Babylon,—if such there be,—though I begin to doubt if ye have aught but madman's gabble."

"Will the king be patient till he have heard to the end?" said the aged Jew: "for he cannot know all the meaning of the first words, till he see how they link with the last. Out of the precious

verses of our prophet, will I now read a few only; the plainest, and most weighty, in regard of that which the king desireth to know."

Still in the same lofty tone with which he had begun, the venerable man then read,

"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it.

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there; and satyrs shall dance there.

And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged."

A loud explosion of brutish laughter arose as Madai ceased, and reverentially closed the book.

"Why, thou silly old fool!" exclaimed Belshazzar: "callest thou that rubbish prophecy? Where standeth, throughout all the earth, a city which, at *some* time, will not be uninhabited, save by wild beasts of the desert? But, my wise friend, thousands of years may come and go before such



shall be the fate of Babylon; and that methinks may satisfy Belshazzar, and his lords, and his wives, and his concubines. As for the Medes, who are to be stirred up, as thy prophet saith, against Babylon, sure am I that no Mede of our day can be thereby predicted; for verily, my good Jew, the Medes now gathered together outside our walls, love both gold and silver as well, almost, as ye,—the *chosen* people; or any other people on the earth. Wiser were it of you all to take physic, and cooling drinks, to assuage the frenzy that hath come over you, from your trust in such delusions, than to go on, blowing up, each in the other, the flames of this fantastic madness. And how, after all, doth the loose raving thou hast read, touch on this present? Methought your fearful prediction was, that this very man Cyrus, now come against us, was the destined overthrower. So, at least, was it said to me."

"And even so it *is*," replied the Jew. "If the king will patiently hearken, the prophet's words shall be read unto him."

"Get thee on then, old man," returned Belshazzar: "but remember thee to give kernel only."

The aged Jew reverentially reopened the book; with tender touch turned the leaves; and read,

"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut!

I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight : I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron :

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayst know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me : I girded thee, though thou hast not known me :"

" And this thou callest a prophecy that Cyrus shall destroy Babylon?" demanded the king, with a contemptuous laugh. " Why, thou silly old man ; not one word concerning Babylon doth thy pretended prophecy contain at all ! It saith, indeed, that Cyrus shall break gates of brass, and bars of iron ; and take treasures, and riches,—as no doubt he will, if he can,—but these gates of brass, and bars of iron, and treasures, may belong to any other city of the world, as well as to Babylon : and the Cyrus predicted, may, for aught that appears in the words, be a man destined to be born ten thousand years hence. There have been already more Cyruses than this present one ; and there may be, in years to come, hundreds more. Merely crazed must ye foolish Jews be, to place trust in such loose stuff ! "

" Loose stuff, to the blind of heart, it may be,"

exclaimed Madai, with firm voice and fearless look; "but, to them whose eyes are opened to the knowledge of God, truth, is it, stronger and more eternal than hills of adamant. Would the king hear the whole, instead of commanding that fragments only be shewn to him, clearly enough would he know that the prediction is *one*: that the Babylon to be overthrown, is this city; and its overthrower this Cyrus. Not from one tree would the king judge of the breadth and length of a forest."

"Take away these foolish men," said Belshazzar, darkly frowning: "but keep them safely: and bid forth my chariot; for I will drive along the western wall, and look down on these terrible destroyers. And now, Hadoram," he continued, after the prisoners had been removed, "I have a word for thee."

Lowly bowed the priest; then stood, awaiting the king's pleasure.

"There have been this day brought hither, for my pleasure, two Jewish damsels, of a beauty excelling that of all my wives and concubines: and I would that they should be instructed in our only true religion; and in the duty which all women owe to the king. Go thou presently to the chamber of the maidens; and hold discourse with them for awhile; till I shall send for thee a royal chariot, and a score of armed horsemen. Take thou then these damsels to the temple of Belus; and shew to them the gods therein; even to the goddess of the upper chamber: and expound to them, as ye go

on, the mysteries of our religion ; for rather as willing offerings would I take them to my arms, than as victims to my power. One hour before sunset, at latest, see thou that the damsels be returned to their chamber : for I may desire to see them."

"The king's command shall in all things be obeyed," said the priest, bowing to the floor : then arose, and withdrew.

"By Baal!" said the king within himself, as he paced the hall, "yonder dark damsel hath witchcraft in her looks, strong as that in the limbs of her betrothed! Life would she bring into the very dead, could they for but one moment look upon her! A jewelled crown is she among women; and, by Nisroch! this night will I wear her! Let the Jew try his magic *then*; and call up all hell to save her!—Nor shall her fair sister escape me! I knew not the value of the treasure that I promised the young Lydian; and I may justly therefore revoke the word. But, justly or not, revoked it is already. Even though he bring Croesus, and all his army, to fight on my side, yet shall that ruby among women never be his: or not till after she hath been worn awhile on the bosom of his master. But, for that accursed Jew, surely shall he go into the fire! Ashkenaz," he called then aloud; "hath not Sarsechim—ha! here he cometh. Approach, Sarsechim. Hast thou done all things that I commanded thee?"

"Everything hath been done, even as the king spake his pleasure," was the humble reply.

"Then have I yet more for thee to execute," said the king. "Hath aught been heard of that magician, Michael, the son of Adad?"

"Nought of him is known by those unto whom I have spoken concerning him," replied the minister: "but, of a surety, escape he cannot, when the king hath commanded that he be taken."

"Yet more still shall they feel my power," said the tyrant, in fierce and haughty tone. "Send out now, and build me up a gallows, in the quarter of the Jews; on which may hang fifty men. And let the officers take from the prisons fifty of the chief men among the Jews; and make them stand upon stools beneath the gallows, with ropes hanging round their necks. Let then the criers go throughout all the quarter of the Jews; and make proclaim of this thing, and say; 'Deliver ye up to the king's officers Michael, the son of Adad; if, before the set of sun, he be not delivered up, then shall these fifty of your chief men be hanged on the gallows; yea, till the flesh drop from their bones shall they hang thereon: and no man shall give them burial.' Methinks, Sarsechim, this may stir them if they loiter."

"The king is ever wise," said the minister; "and his command shall be obeyed."

During a brief time after the departure of Sarsechim, the tyrant stood in musing attitude; as if striving to conceive some other means to assist in the completion of his purpose; or meditating some act by which to gratify his malice.

He smiled darkly at last, as his eye fell upon the treasured book of the Jewish scriptures: and beckoned to his favorite eunuch.

"Take thou this book, Ashkenaz," he said: "place it within the royal chariot; and look thou well that it be not lost; for I have an occasion for it. And give thou command that yonder audacious old Jew, Madai, the son of Gether, be taken in a chariot after me, when I drive upon the walls; for occasion have I for him also. And now, do my bidding; and return in haste; for I would go forth."

He sat down before a table, on which stood the rude writing materials of the period; and, with a look of much satisfaction, wrote upon a leaf of leather. When he had finished his short task, he read over the few words that he had written; smiled; folded the leaf in form of a letter; put it within his vest; took one parting draught of the delicious wine; and passed jocundly from the hall.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“HE feareth me, lest I should disgrace him before men,” said Michael, as he passed rapidly from the presence of the king; “and well saw I in his look that he purposeth to take vengeance secretly. I must be gone; and with haste; so that I may save my own life; and give warning to Cyrus, that Belshazzar seeketh to have him slain privily. The tyrant hath sworn, by his gods, that during three days will he leave the maidens untouched: and no help can I render them by abiding within the city. Also doth an angel of the Lord watch over them. To the God of our fathers, humbly then and hopefully do I commit them! Yet, one word must I speak unto father, and mother, and sister, and brother, and the kind old Zadok, ere I leave the walls; for, haply, many days may it be ere I can with prudence return,—unless with Cyrus; and as his soldier.”

While these thoughts passed through his mind, with swift step he went onward; and, unquestioned, had passed through the gate of the third wall that surrounded the palace, when his ear caught the sound of footsteps behind him, rapidly coming on.

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Suspecting that emissaries of the tyrant might have been sent after him, and for no good purpose, he turned sharply round; and beheld three soldiers, fully armed, in whose faces he instantly read that their design was deadly; and in whose hands he saw the glitter of weapons, but half concealed. Laying hand on his sword, he said, with a voice and look that struck terror into them; "Your purpose is known to me. Another step; and your blood be on your own heads!"

Astounded, the men stood still; hastily looked at each other; and began to draw back. Michael opened the bag, containing the five score shekels of silver, which, with a feeling of disgust, he had brought away; intending to cast it from him so soon as he should be beyond the palace walls,—and, with a sweep of his arm, scattered the silver on the ground before them. "There is that which it will be safer and pleasanter for you to take, than to attempt my life;" he said contemptuously. "Gather it up then; and get ye back to him that sent you."

With eager eyes the soldiers gazed on the treasure; and anxiously looked around to see if any eye could behold. Not a living thing was in sight; either on the ground, or on the roof of house.

"Will my lord betray us, if we let him go?" said one of them, in eager tone.

"Ye do *not* let me go," was the answer; "for I go in your despite. Nevertheless, from my mouth shall ye have no harm."



"Then fly, my lord, fly: and we will fall upon the earth, as if stricken."

In the instant all dropped on the ground; and Michael, not sorry to be thus rid of them, strode on, at a pace that would have defied the pursuit of any man who should have walked after him. Crossing the Euphrates in a boat, he went on, unbating in his speed, till he had reached the house of his parents: and, when he had gained admission, hurriedly did he speak.

"I come but to say farewell: perchance for a few days only. Question me not; but listen. Abinoam hath been taken to prison. Naomi and Ruth have been forced away, and carried to the palace of the tyrant,—for his own bad ends. Yet fear ye not for them overmuch: our Daniel hath said they shall come forth with garments white as snow. Nor for me be ye over sorrowful; for he hath bidden me to be of good cheer; and to do diligently that which Cyrus, the appointed one, hath desired of me: so that, though danger now encompass me, fear ye not but I shall pass through it. For the daughters of Zillah, Araspes hath pleaded; and Belshazzar hath promised, that during three days they shall remain unmolested, while Araspes goeth on the king's business to Croesus. I, also, have been before the tyrant, and mortally have offended him; so that he sent out men to slay me. Them have I escaped: but he will send a thousand, rather than lose his victim. There is for me, therefore, no present safety, but in quitting the

city; and that instantly. I go to Cyrus; for I have matter of great import to say unto him. Embrace me then, all of you; and let me depart, ere the minions of the tyrant overtake me."

With pale faces, tearful eyes, and trembling limbs, Adad and Hamutal began to lament. "Oh my son," said the distracted father, "what will become of us, if thou go hence!"

But Miriam laid her hand on her father's arm, and tenderly said; "Speak thou not to him another word; lest thou hinder him, and bring the destroyer upon him. Give him briefly thy blessing, and let him go."

She was yet speaking, when the voice of a strange man, loud and agitated, was heard without the chamber.

"Take thy sword, Michael, for they are come already," cried Miriam, pale as death. In the next moment Shamgar entered, and spake to Michael. "There is one come hither in great haste, who desireth to see thee;" he said hurriedly: "a Phrygian soldier, methinks he seemeth."

"I will speak unto him," said Michael; and was going forth; when the man thrust open the door, and entered.

"Get thee instantly from out the walls, Michael," he cried, panting for breath; "the king hath sent forth command that thou be delivered up to the officers; for that thou workest witchcraft: and command hath he given, that whoso hideth thee, shall be burned alive,—he, and his father, and his

mother, and his brothers, and his sisters ; and all who are of kin unto him ! Stay not a moment,—but fly.”

“ Dost thou not seek to deceive me,” said Michael, “ that I may go forth even now ; and fall into the hands of mine enemies, who lie in wait for me ? Who art thou, that thou shouldst care for me ? ”

“ Look ! ” cried the man, baring his breast, and then his right arm, on which were ghastly scars : “ thou knowest me now,—Obal, the Phrygian soldier. Thy hand saved my life ; and healed me of my wounds, after the battle of Sardis : but now my life may be taken from me, through thee ; if thou delay me here for much questioning. For the love of all gods, speed thee away.”

“ Methinks, Obal, I remember now thy face,” said Michael : “ how knowest thou that the king hath thus ordered ? ”

“ I heard the command given by Sarsechim himself to the officers,” replied Obal ; “ and stole forth instantly ; and ran to warn thee. Now may the gods protect you all ! farewell.”

He dropped on one knee ; kissed the hand of Michael ; and hurried away.

During a few moments all remained silent. Michael then, in solemn tones addressed them.

“ Speak to me not a word,” said he, “ but, as you would not take from me all heart, and all strength, and all hope, leave this house on the instant : and say not even to your servants whither

ye go. Get ye to the house of Zeruah ; and, for her dead husband's sake, and your own also, she will shelter you till the night ; and *there* will no man seek for you ; or, if they should seek, they will not find. Tell her from me, that I entreat of her to make ready for you the secret chamber. Therein will ye be safe. Now mark me,—thou Miriam chiefly ; for my words will not be forgotten by thee. At midnight go ye all in silence to the Belidian gate ; and say unto the watcher thereat,—Nebat, the Egyptian, whom ye know,—‘ We journey towards Jerusalem.’ Then will the gate be opened unto you ; and ye will find me waiting you ; with all help that may be needful. In the camp of Cyrus will ye have protection, and comfort. Now may the hand of Jehovah be over you ! Remember the hour, and the word. Speak not ; but depart instantly after me.”

Hastily he embraced them ; flung off the gay cloak of Araspes ; and set forth.

“ Be thou assured we will go instantly,” said Miriam, as he passed out.

For a few moments all remained silent ; save for the sobs of Hamutal, and the heavy sighings of Adad. But Miriam then spake out with clear voice : “ Let us put on apparel, and hasten away : for I feel that he speaketh as one instructed from heaven !”

She gave then to her father his staff, and cap ; to her mother her hood and cloak ; put on hastily her own walking attire ; signed to Zadok, and to

Jubal; and led the way in silence. Shamgar went before them to open the gate: and to him, as they passed through it,—fearing that the sorrow and alarm of their faithful servants might cause them to make search after them,—Miriam whispered, “Have thou no fear, Shamgar; and, if we come not back, make ye no enquiry concerning us; but, if any man question you, say boldly that ye know not whither we are gone; nor when we shall return.”

Having said this, she looked earnestly upon him, and moved on. Every face was pale, and every heart was faint. The prison-worn father leaned for support on the arm of Zadok; the trembling mother rested her thin hands on the arms of Jubal and Miriam: and, as they walked, they spake softly and anxiously to each other.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE quarter inhabited by the Jews lay near the centre, toward the western side of the city; yet, such was the speed of his foot, that, ere the sands of the glass could have told the flight of half an hour, Michael stood before the Belidian gate. Nebat, the keeper of the wicket, beheld him with astonishment, so soon returned; and with glad voice was hasting to greet him, when Michael held up his finger, admonishing to silence.

"Open, and let me forth," he said; "then come thou without; that I may speak unto thee, unseen."

Instantly the wicket was opened; and they went out.

"I go forth in haste," he continued; "fleeing from pursuit; for the king hath sent men to take me to prison; and, as I believe, to death. Question me not then, but give ear. This night, at the mid hour, my father, and his brother; my mother, my brother, and my sister, will come hither privately; fleeing also from the vengeance of the king. They will say, 'we journey towards Jerusalem:' and, if thou see not their faces, to recollect them, by these words shalt thou know them. Wilt thou, Nebat,

be as a friend unto us all ; and watch this night before the gate, to let them forth privily ?”

“ Though my head should, on the morrow, be stricken off for doing this thing, yet surely will I do it,” exclaimed the Egyptian fervently, “ for to thee only do I owe, that I lie not now in the earth.”

“ I accept thy promise ; and put full trust in thee,” said Michael : “ and haply the day is not far off, when thy service shall be well rewarded. The God of Israel bless thee !”

“ Long since have I had fullest reward for all service that even my whole life might render to thee, and thine, Michael,” said Nebat. “ Be thou assured that, if I live, I will keep watch beside the gate this night. All the gods protect and prosper thee !”

Michael wrung his hand ; and went forward ; yet not crossing at once the trench ; but skirting the wall towards the North : and Nebat, as for a short time he watched him rapidly clearing the ground, knew well that, to prevent any man who might be on the wall from seeing by which gate he had issued, was it that thus he went about.

Till he had arrived before the next great portal, Michael kept close beside the wall ; then crossed the trench, by the permanent way ; sped on, till he had reached the trench of the besiegers ; dived in, ascended the opposite bank ; and, with little questioning from sentinel, hastily went on till he reached the pavilion of Cyrus.

"The prince is now at meat," said one of the sentries at the door; "but it shall be told him that thou art here."

He called to a servitor who waited within; and bade him report that Michael, the son of Adad, stood without. In brief time Cyrus himself hastened to the door; his face beaming with delight; and caught Michael in his arms.

"Thou art even better than thy promise, my young Samson," he cried. "Welcome, a thousand times welcome! But come in; for we are at table; or just sitting down thereto; and that, with some of our friends, is an occasion that brooketh not delay."

He took the arm of Michael, while speaking; and led him in.

"I have matter of great moment for thine ear, Cyrus," said Michael, stopping for an instant.

"Regardeth it the public weal, or mine own?" asked the prince.

"Important is it to the general good," returned the young Israelite; "but chiefly as touching thee."

"Then let it rest till that which is important to every man hath been attended to. Let us first eat and drink; and then discourse."

They entered an inner tent as the last words were spoken: and all who were seated at table, rose up. Heartily did Croesus give welcome to the visitor: and other officers to whom he was known, heartily greeted him also. But Araspes, with a



troubled countenance, came up, and whispered ;  
"hath aught of evil chanced, that in such haste  
thou comest hither ?"

"Evil to myself hath chanced ; or threatened,  
rather ; for I have escaped, as thou seest. When  
we rise from meat, thou shalt hear all."

"Sit thou here beside me," said the prince to  
Michael ; "for perchance I may desire a word  
with thee, as the thought riseth."

All sat ; and cheerfully by all, save Araspes and  
Michael, was the repast taken : but on *them* hung  
a thick gloom ; not unperceived by their com-  
panions ; and the wine-cup, though pressed upon  
them, brought no gladness.

"Came ye together?" said Cyrus at length,  
addressing Araspes : "for it seemeth that the same  
dark cloud covereth ye both."

"No," replied the young Lydian. "I came  
alone, bearing from Belshazzar a message to  
Crœsus : and, as I left the king, Michael went into  
his presence. How he hath come hither so speedily,  
I guess not : for not slowly I drove in my chariot  
to my own house ; and there, after short delay,  
took horse for thy camp : yet he,—on foot it  
seemeth,—hath reached it almost as soon."

"In truth," said Cyrus, laughing, and looking  
kindly on Michael, "his stride is as that of a  
dromedary. But what foppery hast thou there,  
my young hero?" pointing to the jewelled sword-  
hilt. "That is not the sword of Samson : and  
well did I hope thou wouldst never put aside so

old and mighty a friend, for a gay courtier like that."

"'Tis the gift of Belshazzar," said Michael, faintly smiling: "the sword of Arphaxad, the Susian king, he reported it to be."

"And thou art now his soldier, then: and art come hither to forswear allegiance to me," said Cyrus, archly smiling. "What if I arrest thee as a traitor; and compel thee to fight on my side, as before. But, in what rank of the royal army standest thou? private soldier only? or commander of a cohort?"

"Nay," replied Michael, "even captain over the royal guard,—nought less. Such, at least, was the honor promised:—but in false words only; and to put me from my guard, while mischief the blackest was preparing against me."

"This is strange mystery," said Cyrus, looking surprised, and amused. "In one word, Michael, why gave he thee that sword?"

"As the reward for stringing a bow, and shooting an Indian god;" was the reply.

"Still all is mysterious," exclaimed the prince, his whole face giving out smiles: "speak at once, my friend, plainly; and shewing the thing in all its parts, and relations."

"Plainly then," replied Michael, with look and tone that marked his distaste of the subject; "Belshazzar was pleased to ask proof of my strength: and called for a bow which, since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, no man had been found able

to bend ; saying that, if I could string it, and hit a fair mark with the arrow, he would give me that sword,—worth, as he boasted, the year's revenue of a goodly province."

"It was, doubtless, the famous bow of the Bactrian giant, Samgarnebo," interposed Araspes : "which, it is said, the giant himself could not bend, after it had been made for him by an Indian, cunning in the art."

"Such *was* the name of its owner, as I now remember," pursued Michael : "but easily I strung it ; and looked in the quiver for an arrow. The mark, however, at which the monster desired me to shoot, did not please me ; and I angered him by refusing to obey. Will ye believe it?" looking round upon all, "that mark was a living man ; an old and wretched looking slave ! Darkly enough frowned the tyrant ; but, desiring his sport, set me up another mark ; an Indian god, as I said ;—but of wood ; and him willingly I smote ; and, as the king had wished, full in the eye. Thus came to me the sword : and already, though I have not drawn it, hath it done me good service. To what purpose the despot willed me afterwards to put it, thou shalt hear privately, Cyrus."

"Meantime," said the prince, "as, methinks, our meal is done,—let us look upon the weapon of the Susian king ; for truly, save the sword of Sardanapalus, now in the Median Palace, never saw I weapon so gorgeous in sheath and handle."

Michael took off the belt ; and presented the

sheathed sword. "I need it not," he said; "and if thou, Cyrus, wilt accept that which is the wage of thine enemy, thou wilt pleasure me by taking it as my gift."

"Doubtless," said Cyrus, lightly laughing, "thou being a rich prince, and I one of an oppressed, and impoverished people. Nothing can be more just! That the sword, so given, and by such man, may be no pleasing possession to thee, easily can I understand: and with good will, therefore, will I take it from thee; but, at its true value only. Come, come, my young friend,—not a word. Thy commander, am I; and, in *this* thing, at least, will insist on submission. But, by my faith," as he looked alternately upon the flashing handle, the bright blade in his right hand; and on the scabbard of gold and gems in his left,—"*this* is indeed a weapon worthy of, not a king only, but a kingly warrior: for never saw I work more cunning; more beautiful, at once, and serviceable for the brave man's hand! It is mine then, my young friend; and shall go with me into my next battle. Fitter, too, for my hand than for thine. No other than the sword of Samson ought to be wielded by an arm strong almost as Samson's. Thy armour, from helmet to greaves, is still in my possession, Michael. I told thee, at the time when, in gloomy mood, thou didst cast it from thee, that the day would come when thou wouldst call aloud for it again: and now that day *is* come: and, ere the night, my own armourer shall make

thy shield bright as burnished silver. But thine irresistible sword must not be wanting. Take thought then, how securely to have it brought hither ;—unless, perchance, thou purpose to return for an hour or twain to thine own house."

"I may not return thither," said Michael, shaking the head. "In my great haste, I thought not of it: nor see I way by which it may now be brought hither; for, in truth, all who are of kin to me, have, ere this, fled the house, to escape the vengeance of the despot."

"Thou dost amaze me," said the prince; "and wholly vain would it be for me to labor at conjecture, how it can have come to pass that, within so few hours, such strange things can have been. But, come to my private tent; and let me hear all. To thy charge, Cræsus, I commit the sword, once of Arphaxad, but now of Cyrus; for I see how its splendor catcheth thy beauty-loving eye."

Cræsus laughed, and nodded his pleasure; but answered not. "*Thy* business, Araspes," continued the prince; looking back ere he passed the door of the inner tent, "concerneth Cræsus, rather than myself,—doth it not?"

"No, prince, it concerneth thee also," said the young Lydian. "But my heaviest sorrow, and that of Michael, are one and the same: and grateful would it be to me to speak with thee thereon, and to hear from thy mouth words of comfort and hope."

"Then speak thou presently with Cræsus: and afterwards come to us in my own tent."

Saying these words, he drew aside the curtain-door; and, with Michael, went within.

"I am once more, for a time, thy soldier, Cyrus," said Michael, when they stood alone in the private tent; "heart and soul am I thine: for not alone my own grievous wrongs; but, also, the express admonition of our holy prophet Daniel, thereunto impel me."

"Thy wrongs I lament, my young friend," replied the prince; "and gladly will labor to redress them. For the exhortation of your prophet, I am thankful: though thou didst not, I hope, make known to him aught of that wherewith I trusted thee."

"I have not seen him," returned Michael; "nor sent to him other message, than a request to speak with him touching a great matter: yet did his reply make manifest, that all my thoughts were known to him; and not those only, but even the deed, whatsoever it be, which thou thyself dost meditate."

"Ha!" exclaimed the astonished prince; "what, then, said he?"

"Thou wilt believe me, Cyrus, when I tell thee, thou wert not, at that time, even thought of by me. Listen, and then say, if, by aught less than a knowledge more than man's, or by inspiration from Heaven, he could have known such hidden matters. I told thee, last night, that the two beautiful grand-daughters of Zedekiah, king of

Jerusalem, were beloved by Araspes, and by me; and that to one of them am I betrothed. These maidens have been this day seized by officers of the king; and carried to the palace, for the gratification of his appetite. Araspes went before him, to plead for them; and to him the tyrant gave promise that, during three days, he would not lay hand upon them, provided Araspes should succeed in some mission on which he was then sending him to Croesus. Meantime,—as Zillah, their mother, had enjoined me,—I had gone to the abode of the prophet; hoping that by his wisdom might he direct us so to act, that we might obtain their freedom. As I before said, the request which I sent to him, was but for permission to ask his counsel on a great matter: yet,—mighty indeed is the marvel!—through the mouth of a venerable priest returned he unto me words like these: ‘Be of good cheer, Michael, for the damsels shall pass through abomination with garments white as snow! Do thou thy work diligently, even as Cyrus, the appointed one, hath desired of thee!’”

“This passeth my understanding,” exclaimed the prince: “but I trust, at least, that his injunction may be thoroughly obeyed by thee: and then, no doubt have I that the damsels will escape from the monster; and that all your wrongs will be atoned for. Yet, Michael, if, secretly at least, thou canst not return to the city; and, with certain of the young men of thy people, go forward at the fit

time, to fling open for me the gate of which I spake to thee,—much greater may be the bloodshed, ere I can force the way."

"I am wholly thy soldier," was the reply; "and will do faithfully whatsoever thou shalt command: for, in obeying thee, I feel, now, that I shall be obeying the will of our God; as expressed through thee."

"Get thou then thy sword, Michael," exclaimed Cyrus triumphantly; and, though they stand against us as rocks, we will hew a way through them. But, still thou hast not told me, wherefore the tyrant is so incensed against thee that, not thyself only, but even, as thou saidst, all who are of kin to thee, have been compelled to flee the city."

Briefly and simply Michael related the proposition of the king; and the consequences that followed his refusal. "And be thou on thy guard, Cyrus," he added, "for he may seek more pliant instruments."

"Have thou no fear," said the prince, smiling. "I offer not to thee gold, as the reward of thy faithfulness; and rank in mine army thou hast refused; but, for the deliverance of those whom thou lovest will I strive; and for the deliverance of thy whole people also. As for aught else that I may desire to do,—for thine, if not directly for thyself,—I now say nothing. But here cometh thy friend."

Araspes entered at that moment; and, after him, Croesus, laughing heartily.



"We have indited to Belshazzar a short epistle," said the Lydian king; "and, by my faith, Cyrus, thou must read it."

"Nay," replied the prince; "I will have no share in your treasons: let me hear nought of it."

"Then will we conspire against thee, in thine own tent, and under thy very eye," said Crœsus, merrily, as he proceeded to fold up the scroll. "Yet 'tis fit thou shouldst know, Cyrus," he continued in a grave tone, "that this Babylonian tyrant hath seized on the damsels beloved by" . . .

"I know it already, my Crœsus; and purpose to seek speedy amends. But now, if thou, Araspes, hast nought to say unto me, save touching this brutal violence, and your secret treason, I will to horse again; for, throughout the whole of my Persian cohorts must I this day go; and, as yet, but half the task hath been done. Ride thou along with us, Michael; that thou mayst see of what stuff are made the men who will strike with thee."

He went out as he spake these words; and was followed by all, save Crœsus; who, returning to the outer tent, flung himself on a couch; drew from his vest a book; and, with complacent countenance, began to read. The gorgeous sword of the Susian king lay upon a table, close to him; and, ever and anon, his eye glanced from the book to the gleaming weapon. At times, he rested the volume on his knee; stretched forth his hand; and, taking up the gemmed hilt lightly betwixt

his fingers, gazed admiringly, from the diamond on the pommel, to the extremity of the broad bright blade: held it now upright; now with point downwards; and now traverse; turning it from side to side, that he might mark the flashing of light from the polished surface. But never grasped he the hilt, and shook the blade, like a soldier eager for the battle. To him, it was the beauty and the richness; the gold, the jewels, and the exquisite skill of the workman, that made it attractive: and when, after a time, his eye had been satisfied, gently he laid down the sword; and, with a pleasant smile, resumed his book.

Accompanied by a train of officers, splendid in scarlet and steel, and gold, Cyrus, himself in a plain military attire, rode leisurely along the ranks of the iron-clothed squadrons of Persia: and still, by word and sign, made known his approbation; and received everywhere, tokens of the unbounded love and confidence of all. Michael and Araspes rode for awhile side by side, in earnest talk; and great was the astonishment of Araspes when he heard, word for word; and thrice repeated; the message of Daniel: and great his delight also at the promised deliverance.

"Let his prophecy prove truth," said he, "and I can no longer withhold belief in the God whom he serveth; and by whom he must have been inspired. Nought then will stand 'twixt me and Ruth. But—so madly do I love her now, that I can see no right, and no wrong, save in that

which she willeth, or forbiddeth! Oh! that a stone from heaven would fall this instant on the head of that foul tyrant; and make him as a flattened clod!"

"His hour draweth nigh; of that be thou assured," replied Michael; and would have spoken further, but, at that instant, he beheld Cyrus beckon to him. At once, therefore, he rode up; and took place at his left hand.

"How likest thou the aspect of yonder troop?" said the prince, as they paused opposite a numerous body of men; all of great stature; clothed in complete mail; and standing steadfast as a wall of iron.

"Soldiers after thy own heart, Cyrus, they seem to be;" replied Michael, smiling, as he looked into the enthusiastic face of the prince.

"And after *thy* own heart, when the battle hath warmed it, wilt thou find them, my young hero;" said Cyrus: "for of those be the men that will follow thee, when the great stroke hath to be attricken. Their chief officers will meet thee this night in my tent; that they may well know the plough that is to rend up the earth before them."

Slowly rode Cyrus before this chosen cohort; pausing often directly opposite the ranks; that every eye might well see the man whom he honored; and by whom, at the trying moment, they were to be led on.

As they went forward, there came from the city

a great sound of voices ; and, when they looked up, behold ! a throng of men upon the battlements ; and, behind them, horsemen, and chariots : and, distinguished over all by the sun-shade held over him, the king himself ; standing upright, and looking upon the army on the plain.

Cyrus, and his train, stopped ; turned their horses, and gazed upwards. Ere long, there came flying through the air a rough-looking ball ; and in the same instant was heard the clang of the war-engine that had cast it. Close over the plume of Cyrus himself it passed ; and fell at the distance of a few paces behind. All turned ; and with horror beheld that it was the head of an old man ; and yet streaming blood. In an instant Michael leaped from his horse ; and stooped to look upon the face. " 'Tis the head of the venerable Madai," he exclaimed, clasping his hands ; at once shocked, and disgusted,—yet relieved ; for, by the long grey hair and beard, he had feared that one still far dearer to him had been the victim.

Loud were the bursts of laughter that came from the wall, when his grief had been beheld ; and far away were they caught up, and continued, though by men who could know nought of their first cause. Slowly Michael remounted ; and Cyrus was just about to proceed, when another object, far larger, but undistinguishable in shape, came whirling above them. It fell, like the former, at short distance behind Cyrus ; and then was it easily

seen to be the headless body of a man, clad in the habit of the Jews.

"Give order that it be decently interred," said Cyrus to one of his officers; and, with saddened countenance, moved slowly on. He had not, however, proceeded far, when a soldier ran after him; and, with due salutation, presented to him a packet, that had been found securely fastened round the body of the man. Cyrus stopped; and, unfolding a wrapper of thick, richly gilded silk, drew forth a book; and, with it, a sheet of leather, in form of a letter. Opening this, he found, written in rough characters, the following words. "From Belshazzar, king of Assyria, to Cyrus; the fool, predicted by the madman. Let him read the prophecy; and burst the brazen gates, if he can."

With a calm smile,—while the peals of laughter roared again from the wall,—the prince placed the valuable missive within his vest; and opened the book. "The Hebrew letter, methinks," he said: "I read it not. Knowest thou, my young friend, the written characters of your scribes; so as to expound unto me the matter of this book; thus strangely presented?"

"Our Holy Scriptures!" solemnly exclaimed Michael, clasping his hands; and his face expressing horror at the sacrilegious act. Reverently he took the book, and turned to the first page. "'Tis the priceless copy, Cyrus," in almost awe-stricken tone he exclaimed, "used on the most solemn occasions only, by our high priests alone: and written

by the very hands of our prophets, inspired by God; and by the hands of our Judges, our Kings, and our sacred Historians. The riches of an empire would not have purchased it from our people! As thou wouldst hope for the blessing of Heaven, Cyrus, let this book be guarded more watchfully than a mine of diamonds; for there is no Israelite, but would rather pour out his heart's blood, than suffer it to have injury!"

"Then to thy charge I give it, Michael," replied the prince; "for guard more zealous and strong, I know not where to find. The gentle Belshazzar knew not its worth; or not thus recklessly would he have cast it away. In the brief epistle that accompanieth the gift, he biddeth me read the prophecy therein; and burst the brazen gates, if I can. Now, of this same prophecy, thy kinsman Zadok, and thyself also, spake unto me yestereve; and, when the time serveth, gladly would I hear it interpreted. This night, perchance, thou mayst so pleasure me."

"Willingly as I would give food to the famishing!" said Michael eagerly, as he reverently took from the hand of the prince the inestimable treasure; "for thou, O Cyrus, great and good as all men confess thee to be, art, in the knowledge of the true God, even as one dying for want."

"Well, my young friend," replied the prince; "then believe me when I say that, willingly as thou wilt give that which thou esteemest true

wisdom, even so willingly will I receive it, when thou shalt convince me that such it is."

Again, with his train, he moved onward ; pausing, ever and anon, before each separate squadron of horse, or foot, all blazing in scarlet and steel ; and addressing to each words of encouragement ; and giving promise that the hour drew nigh. All knew the strength of the city ; and marvelled in what way might the stroke against it be directed : yet had no one presumed to question ; and no man felt doubt that some great thing would ere long be done,—for, was it not Cyrus who thus spake to them ?

After awhile, as slowly they rode on, the prince and his officers began to note that, with a strange expression of wonder, the faces of the soldiers were directed towards the sky ; and when they also turned to gaze thereon, behold ! there appeared above the city a dark cloud of marvellous fashion ; even in the form of a man ; floating horizontally on the air, with the face looking downward. Right over the midst of the city it hung motionless ; yet still gathered bulk, and distinctness of form ; till some there were who believed they saw in the extended right hand a shadowy sword ; and a finger of the outstretched left hand pointing downward, as if threatening vengeance. Ever and anon, as forward they rode, did Cyrus and his train turn their eyes towards the strange appearance ; and still, with each successive gaze, did it wax larger ; till, at length, the whole city lay overshadowed at

noon day ; though, on all the country beyond the walls, the sun still poured his silent flood of fire and splendor.

“Mark you that?” said Cyrus to his officers, as at length all paused to gaze. “Think ye yonder night at noon, so mysteriously cast over the wicked city, bodeeth not the fate that cometh upon her? And what is the Power that seemeth to threaten it? that cloud-like shape, ruling the air: cloud-like; yet, still, methinks, no cloud, of vapour moulded; such as those which bring the rain; and carry in their depths the thunder and the bolts; for never yet did eye behold vapour so fashioned; so terrible; so like a thing of life, of power and majesty beyond all thought of man. What it may be, I know not; for of such existence,—if existence in truth it is,—never have I heard from priest, or sage; or read thereof in book.”

“The Spiritaal Powers, as our religion teacheth us,” said Michael, “are twofold, — Powers of Heaven, which are God’s holy angels; and Powers of Hell,—which are they who once had their place in the heavenly regions; and worshipped before the throne of Jehovah; but who, in their pride, rebelled against their Creator; and were cast out from heaven, down to the realms of darkness, and of woe! By permission of supernal Might, these come upon the earth, to tempt men to wickedness; and so to bring on them destruction. What form



soever they please,—God not forbidding,—may these several Powers put on. The holiest of Angels,—coming as God's minister of wrath,—may clothe himself in darkness as in a robe; and scatter vengeance upon the wicked: a Spirit the most impure of Hell,—not by direct command prohibited,—may hide his foulness under a glory as of the sun. That yonder mysterious shape, now casting a darkness over mighty Babylon, is one of these two orders of Spirits, I cannot doubt: but overbold, methinks, would he be who, without farther proof, should venture to say, 'it is of Heaven,' or 'it is of Hell.' Yet, that by command, or by permission of Heaven it cometh,—be it of Good, or be it of Evil,—foolish would it be to question; and unwise to doubt, that towards some great work at hand hath it been sent."

"I accept thy interpretation, my young friend," said Cyrus; "for verily a great work there is at hand; and one in which I pray for the aid and blessing of thy God; and of all Gods. But see! the form dissolveth!"

Even as the smoke of a great fire, when it hath risen aloft, and the air seemeth to drink it up; so rapidly, while all eager eyes were fixed upon it, did the mysterious cloud lose shape, and substance; till, after brief time, all was melted away; as salt cast into water is melted; and becomes invisible!

"As strange its going, as was its coming!" exclaimed Cyrus: "nor will I doubt, that 'twas

the shadowing forth of mighty events at hand. But, not the less, our own work must we do, wisely, and diligently, and firmly ; as though on our hands alone rested all the issue ; and the Gods looked on, indifferent. Let us return.

END OF VOLUME THE FIRST.

